

# Fifth Estate



Summer 2024

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# The Calm before...What?

**S**harks dive deeper before hurricanes. Wolves howl when a storm is approaching. Snakes slither away from earthquakes.

Something's happening here, and definitely, what it is ain't exactly clear. Unfortunately, our intellects don't provide us the instinctual early warning system our animal cousins possess.

In almost every era of human history since the nation state arose, has been filled with human engendered catastrophes; wars, plagues, massacres, political repression. Did people before us have a sense of foreboding that now seems to permeate all sectors of society?

Maybe the closest prescience came before World War II that was marked by the rise of fascist dictatorships and their bellicose leaders who threatened to do what occurred. With wars in Palestine, Ukraine, and Sudan, and threats of nuclear weapons, there is an eerie, similar, 1939 feeling to our era.

Radicals then, including anarchists, warned of what was impending in the near future, but the madness of the leaders, often echoed in the populace, was ignored. In another era, the Cuban Missile Crisis marched the world to the brink of nuclear war, but that time it was averted.

Those who realize that such crises are an inherent part of civilization and the nation state can do no differently regardless of what may lie ahead.

Organize. Disrupt. Refuse. Resist. Offer solidarity. Put forth a vision as an antidote to nationalistic insanity.

You haven't missed an issue; we have. This issue follows our Fall 2023 edition.

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estate**

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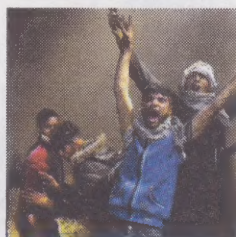
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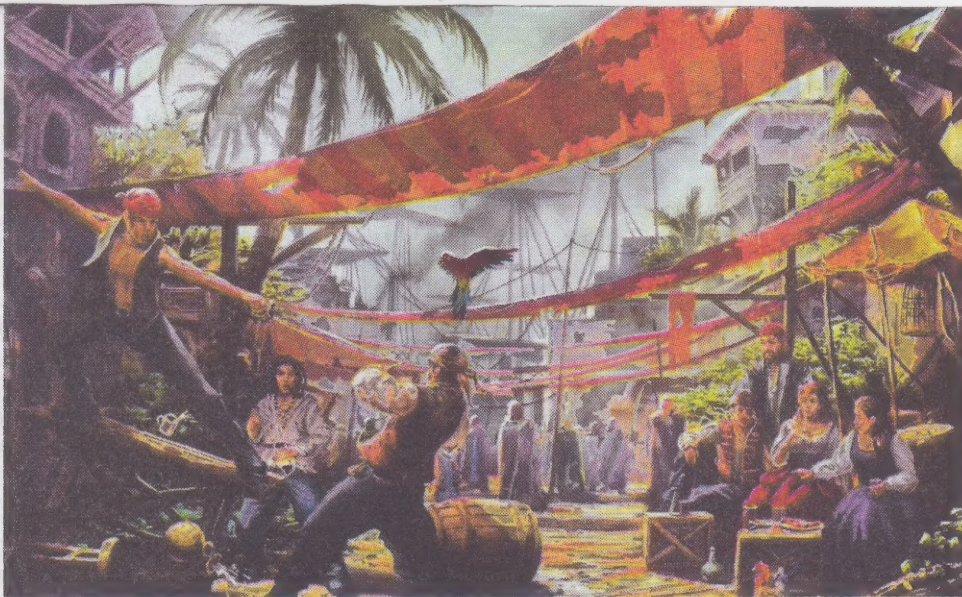
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## David Graeber's *Pirate Utopias*

### Pirate Enlightenment, or the New Libertalia

David Graeber

Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2023

#### ERIC LAURSEN

David Graeber left us one last book before he died, sadly, at the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020. *Pirate Enlightenment, or the New Libertalia*, originally published in French in 2019, brings together the related projects that bookended his career: the anthropology of Madagascar, including how its highland communities avoid (one of David's favorite words) the state, and the many ways that humans have organized themselves into complex, non-hierarchical societies throughout history.

The subject of his last book (really, a long essay) is once again the island where David did his doctoral field research, and his knowledge of the place is so deep that he can load the text with suppositions and speculation and still build a strong, convincing story out of scanty materials. In particular, he examines the communities in the northeast quarter of the island that developed out of the encounters between pirates and Malagasy people during the late 17th and early 18th centuries: the golden age of piracy.

As he did in *The Dawn of Everything*, the monumental study of early human societies that he co-authored with archaeologist David Wengrow, he knits together an alternative history of the Enlightenment era in which the pirate settlements that melded with the Indigenous peoples and were already the subject of legends and popular entertainment by the time of Voltaire, formed, "in a sense, the first Enlightenment political experiment."

Some of the pirate crews that set up shop in Madagascar were already creating intentional, non-hierarchical commu-

nities aboard ship, David notes, and when they established settlements on land, they tried to replicate the form there. But they had no economic or cultural capital other than the booty they brought with them from raiding, and so they had to join forces with existing Malagasy communities: most importantly, with local women who were adept at raising and trading cattle, then the island's most valuable agricultural commodity, and turning the pirates' loot into capital.

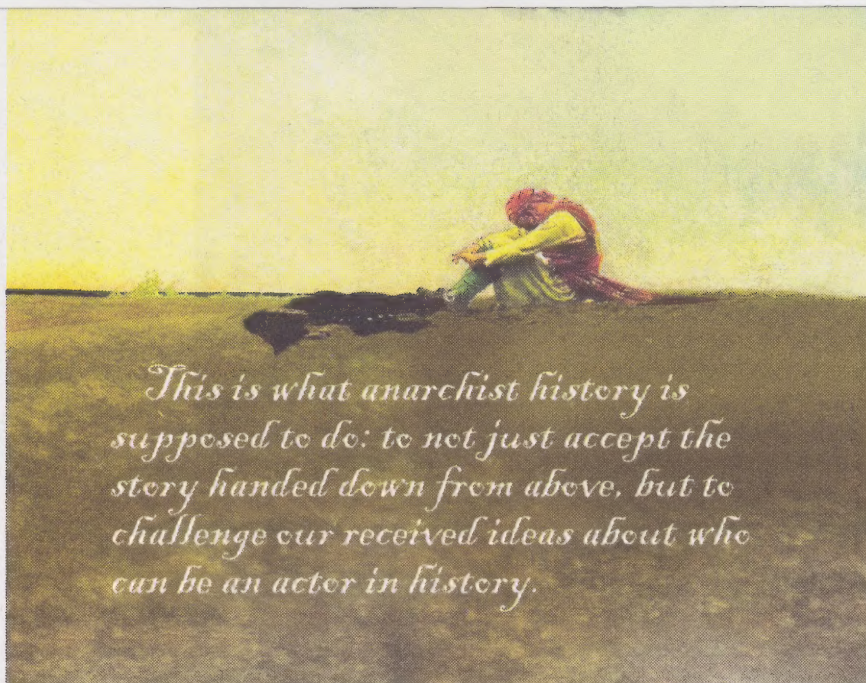
Together, they "re-created local society," igniting an "egalitarian revolution" that produced the Betsimisaraka confederation or kingdom, which flourished in the mid-18th century under a leader named Ratsimilaho, said to be the son of the Anglo-American pirate chief Thomas Tew, and which still gives its name to the second largest ethnic group on the island.

David's aim in this book is to trace the Betsimisaraka confederation's relationships with its neighbors and tease out what kind of community or polity it really was. Mostly, his tools are 18th century European accounts, all biased and many of them far from first-hand, along with some scanty archaeological finds. But all of this is great fodder for an anarchist anthropologist and historian, because as anarchists, many of us have a deep affection for cultural fusions, disappearance and evasion, and the "profoundly proletarian vision of liberation, necessarily violent and ephemeral," that pirate culture has come to represent.

This perspective enables David to detect a story in the existing sources that's quite different from the ones that traditional or even Marxist historians have told. In their accounts, pirates bearing booty allied themselves with local Malagasy elites to accumulate power and wealth, much like European capitalists.

In David's version, by contrast, the pirates allied themselves with independent-minded women and outsider or subject peoples against the elites, aiming to create their own





*This is what anarchist history is supposed to do: to not just accept the story handed down from above, but to challenge our received ideas about who can be an actor in history.*

participatory, self-governing communities: a “creative synthesis of pirate governance and some of the more egalitarian elements in traditional Malagasy political culture.”

Instead of prefiguring the absorption of the Malagasy peoples into global capitalism, the pirates and their Indigenous comrades were searching for ways to avoid it. Whether you agree with his take or not—and he argues it very well—David in his last book has made a fascinating contribution to the literature on pirates that complicates how we understand first encounters between Europeans and the Indigenous in the lands that European states would later colonize. He asks us, implicitly, to consider whether it had to turn out the way it did.

This, of course, is what anarchist history is supposed to do: to not just accept the story handed down from above, but to challenge our received ideas about who can be an actor in history. As in *The Dawn of Everything*, David refuses to treat non-European peoples as either primitives or pure victims. In his interpretation, they were savvy, sophisticated people who made pragmatic, consciously political pacts with newcomers to further their own interests against both their own elites and the European states that would soon be attempting to take over the island.

What if, for example, the Europeans who came back from Madagascar with stories of strange pirate kingdoms had, in fact, been hoodwinked by the people they met there, sold a yarn that was tailored to meet their state-capitalist expectations? Was Ratsimilaho really a mighty king, or just a first among equals, a mock king using pirate loot to play the role of monarch?

“Much as on pirate ships,” David writes, “it was convenient to develop the reputations of all-powerful and bloodthirsty captains to overawe outsiders, even if internally, most decisions were made by majority vote, the founders of the [Betsimisaraka] confederation found it useful, especially when dealing with outsiders, to maintain the pretext

of having an all-powerful king, and the existence of so much stolen finery made it easy to create something that looked like a royal court without having to make any significant reorganization of internal labor regimes.”

This proposition brings us back to the idea of avoidance, and the question of what indigenous peoples did when they encountered the agents of far-off states and had to decide how to establish relations without being absorbed or destroyed by them. Was the best course to imitate them, setting up their own states and playing the power game, as later Malagasy monarchs did in the face of French colonial pressure, or Hawaii’s

kings when confronted with a creeping American takeover of their economy? Or, was it to evade, dissemble, and relocate as necessary?

*Pirate Enlightenment* doesn’t directly raise these questions, but David’s analysis of the Betsimisaraka confederation suggests a direction he might have taken in the second volume of his study with Wengrow; an examination of the often thin line, historically, between states and mock states, and a challenge to the materialist view of society.

Do people always set up new communities or polities to amass wealth and power—to “create economic value,” in capitalist parlance—or do they have other motivations? Elites, David writes, “are assumed to be in all important ways the same,” always “primarily in the business of accumulating wealth and power, and that if they can be differentiated, it is mainly by how much wealth and power they have so far managed to accumulate.”

Popular movements and intellectual currents that don’t fit this mold—“cosmology, value, meaning—are largely written out of the picture” and humanity is “cursed to obsessive-compulsively enact the exact same play.” We are not, David contends, and this becomes clearer in the pages of *Pirate Enlightenment*, where he demonstrates once again that human history is far more varied, quirky, and entertaining than we’ve been taught.

Only a couple of generations separated Tom Tew and Ratsimilaho from Tom Paine in the American Revolution and Gracchus Babeuf in the French, and only a couple more from Proudhon and Bakunin. So, it’s fair to argue, as David does, that the tales Europeans imbibed about these shadowy figures on an island thousands of miles to the south, however garbled, are part of our anarchist heritage as well.

Eric Laursen is a longtime anarchist writer, journalist, and activist. His latest book is *Polymath: The Life and Professions of Dr. Alex Comfort, Author of “The Joy of Sex.”*





# Rewilding

**As civilization increasingly fails, radical alternatives are before us**

**Human Rewilding in the 21st Century:  
Why Anthropologists Fail**  
James M. Van Lanen  
Birch Top Hill Press, 2024

**JOHN ZERZAN**

**R**ecently, there has been somewhat surprising interest from mainstream media in topics of domestication and rewilding.

On January 1, National Public Radio devoted an hour to a conversation with Woniya Dawn Thibeault, whose book *Never Alone* recounts her victory in the televised “Alone” arctic competition, with a very sympathetic moderator.

Thibeault stressed wildness, the joy and energy she experienced in communion with a very harsh environment. A powerful, non-compromised embrace of wild nature, including her own! CNN had earlier aired a similar experience and critique from England involving a large parcel of land removed from domestication.

There may be a public opening to basically question an alternative to visibly failing civilization. And into this possible breach is James Van Lanen’s *Human Rewilding in the 21st Century: Why Anthropologists Fail*.

Van Lanen is himself an anthropologist with extensive experience in Alaska with Native peoples, also some

in Africa with the Hadza.

*Human Rewilding* is a contribution of top-flight scholarship that deeply probes the work of contemporary anthropologists of a progressive orientation. At base, rewilding is the active critique of domestication and civilization. The progressives reject it. Van Lanen responds to the recent work of three of them: Noa Levi et al, Ben Pitcher, and Graeber and Wengrow in their much debated, *The Dawn of Everything*.

It becomes instantly clear while reading the book that much more than an academic debate is at stake. In fact, the book reveals two major ironies. One is that it is not the anti-civ perspective that rejects anthropological orthodoxy; rather, it is the progressive outlook that does so.

Since the 1960s, it is orthodox, accepted anthropology that has pointed out the fateful consequences of the defeat of free hunter-gatherer life (plus Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*).

Van Lanen honors work in this regard by the likes of James Woodburn, R.B. Lee, Claude Levi-Strauss, Joseph Tainter, Stanley Diamond, Eleanor Leacock, Tim Ingold, and many other respected thinkers.

It’s not that they would endorse the same radical implications that Van Lanen draws from their work, but that

his work stands squarely upon their shoulders. The progressives evade the common verdict about the negative results of domestication and its inner logic of repression, ever greater levels of control. The title of Graeber and Wengrow’s *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* reflects this revisionist approach.

The second major irony is related to the first: it’s the Left that emerges as perhaps civilization’s last defender. Van Lanen shows the virulence that progressive anthropologists often exhibit toward the anti-civ point of view. Stunning in a sense, but we might remember that the Left never challenged the basics of domesticated life, not even now when a lethal outcome becomes so starkly evident at every level, in every sphere.

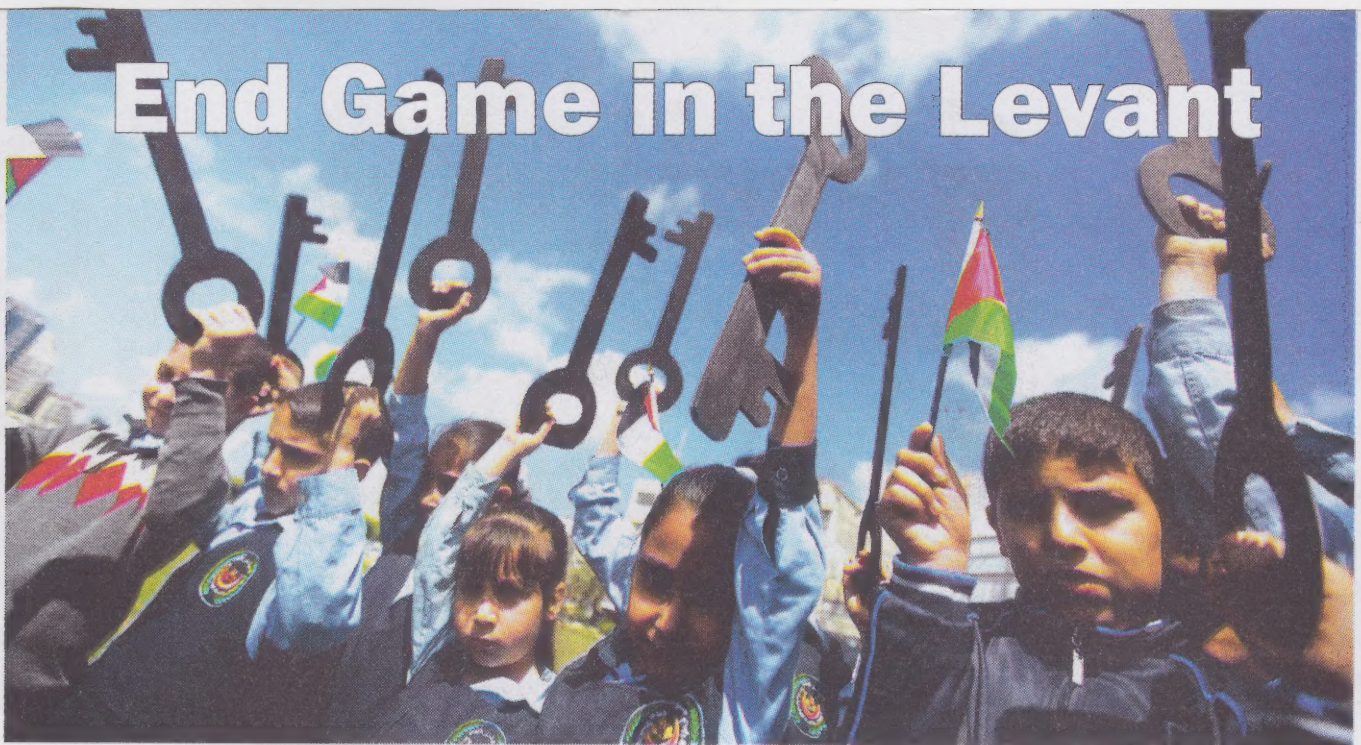
Civilization is chronic war, ever more work, the death of nature and so much more.

*Human Rewilding* is an extremely important book, very well-written, with equal parts scholarship and passion for life.

John Zerzan has written for the Fifth Estate since the 1970s. He is author of several collections of his essays including *When We Are Human: Notes From The Age Of Pandemics*, 2021. A memoir will be published later this year by Feral House.



# End Game in the Levant



Palestinian children hold keys during a 2014 rally marking the Nakba in Gaza City. The keys represent the desire and demand for a return of the homes and land taken from them in 1948.

## One-State, Two-State, No-State Solution? Maybe No Solution

PETER WERBE

**B**efore anything can be said or written about what has happened in Palestine and Israel since Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack, recognition must be given to the enormity of the crimes Israel's merciless army has committed against the Palestinian people.

This is being written in late May 2024 and hopefully Israel's genocidal intentions have been stilled by the time it is read.

The assumption herein is that the project of the Israeli ethno-nationalist state, with its own peculiar set of circumstances, is a product of the 500-year trajectory of the failed states of Europe bursting beyond their geography with an attempt to resolve their inherent problems by conquest, genocide, land confiscation, ethnic cleansing, and colonization.

That said, several things are clear: the Palestinian resistance movements with their aspirations for a national homeland and reclamation of land stolen from its people have no intention of ceasing their confrontation with Zionism even after suffering catastrophic loss of life and the utter destruction of Gaza. The Zionist nation, for its part, has as its goal, the creation of a Greater Israel encompassing all of the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Both sides see their future in a nation, in some form, as stretching from the River to the Sea.

On the face of it, these views seem mutually impossible, but not for those who advocate a single, secular, non-sectarian state that recognizes equal rights of Palestinians as well as Jews who would be former Israelis since an exclusivist Jewish state would cease to exist.

In the short run, as well as perhaps the long, this is not a solution Israel would ever accept since their non-negotiable stance is defense of an ethnically defined state with special privileges for Jews. They are probably correct in fearing that Jewish population would soon lose a demographic race, becoming a minority in a singular state. But they are probably not correct in fearing that traditional anti-Semitism would arise to threaten Jews as it has historically.

The so-called Two-State Solution, the darling of liberals both in Israel and in the U.S., is equally a chimera, no matter how many other countries recognize a state not yet in formation. After seizing 78 percent of historic Palestine in 1948, the Jewish armies expelled a great proportion of its indigenous population into the Gaza Strip and Lebanon where they existed for decades in refugee camps and a worldwide diaspora.

The logic of David Ben Gurion, founder of the state of Israel, was not to take all of the disputed territory of historic Palestine, which at that time would have included the Jordanian territory west of the River. He realized this would have created an administrative nightmare requiring ruling over a large, resistant Palestinian population.

However, the expansionist wing of Zionism has always eyed the West Bank as an integral part of Israel as Judea and Samaria, but was forestalled until the 1967 Six-Day War in which they triumphed militarily and politically, and began administering the West Bank as an occupied territory. Despite being forced to live under an apartheid regime brutally



administered by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the occupied people maintained constant resistance and frequent intifadas uprisings.

As both a hedge against the resistance, but also a move towards integrating the West Bank into Israel proper, the Tel Aviv government allowed Jewish settlers with special privileges to colonize the district to the point that today there are over half a million settlers in the West Bank and growing steadily according to a December 2023 report in *The Times of Israel*.

This number makes the idea of a Palestinian state in the West Bank an impossibility and intentionally so. A Palestinian state of three million with a Jewish minority is not seriously considered and really never was regardless of all the talk and conferences.

Such a state would undoubtedly require the reintegration of Jewish settlers into Israel which is not feasible geographically or economically. Besides, the majority of the settlers are religious fanatics who see themselves as the vanguard of the Greater Israel vision. An attempt at a forced exodus of the settlers would most probably ignite a civil war. Plus, Israel's 2018 Nation-State law defines itself as having "an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel." End of discussion about a two-state solution.

Anarchists such as sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh propose what may seem like the least possible proposal: a No-State Solution. Its probability is no less realistic than the others given Israeli intransigence and commitment to their current definition of as ethno-state.

However, Palestinian society and culture remains intact, is highly organized, and exists both in Gaza, the West Bank, and the diaspora without a state. Bamyeh asserts they have what has functioned as the social experience of an organic anarchy without it being identified as such. This might make it possible to work in the context of autonomous groups in cooperation with others, without a centralizing state.

Although probably the majority of Palestinians embrace the idea of statehood, the enduring success of communities such as Rojava and Chiapas help make the no-state solution less general and abstract. Certainly not perfect, but open to anarchistic imaginings.

Israel and its supporters speak of their desire for peace and cite what is known as "the generous offers" that have been put forth for decades which would allow a semblance



## No-State Solution. Its probability is no less realistic than the others given Israeli intransigence and commitment to their current definition of as ethno-state.

of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. However, the proposals were never offered with any expectation they would be accepted.

They are part of a never-to-be-fulfilled peace process that is not intended to bring an end to hostilities, but rather to give the illusion that Israel is the reasonable party in the dispute.

There is no chance that the peace Israel desires will be achieved even af-

ter the mass slaughter and intentional destruction of Gaza. Resistance is deep-seated and permanent within Palestinian culture and expresses itself through an intricate network of community organizations and a myriad of tactics from non-violence to armed attacks. Overall, its slogan is, "Generation after generation until Palestine is free." In other words, relentless, ceaseless resistance to Israeli domination.

Many on the Israeli right realize this and advocate what secured the Americas for European settlers: genocide. Rabbi Eliyahu Mali speaking in Jaffa recently, addressed an audience of IDF soldiers. "Do not spare any soul," he advised them, including women and children. Such it is with Jewish biblical doctrine which is replete with massacres of the enemies of the Jews.

Rabbi Mali justifies genocide by noting it is women who create terrorists, but the children as well because, "Today, he is a baby; tomorrow he is a fighter; we will shoot them." Again, grotesquely, the man of god is probably correct. Those who formed the Hamas assault force in the invasion of Israel were very possibly the sons and grandsons of Palestinians who remember one of the 15 Israeli wars against the Gaza Strip. Although there was great shock as this talk went viral, it is exactly what the IDF has done in Gaza, realizing the Palestinian fighters of the future are currently in formation.

Israel has closed the door on every option except what they have currently chosen, and has done so since the origin of the Jewish state. Its image as a progressive country whose only desire is to live in peace with its neighbors and those who are under its control has been shattered.

It has always been a settler state, a warfare state, an apartheid state, but was able to deflect this perception from most of the world. Now, the mask is off and Israel has become a pariah state with only a few Western nations including the U.S. maintaining the pretense of the country being a liberal democracy desiring peace with the Palestinians and its Arab neighboring countries. If Israel's punitive campaign



ends with as much brutality as it is currently displaying at this writing, perhaps even the U.S. ruling class will have had enough of the disruption it causes in world political and economic relations.

The movement of Palestinian solidarity has spread world-wide and encompasses governments as wide-spread as Ireland and South Africa, engendered a youth movement reminiscent of the 1960s, and exposed the crimes committed by a nation whose campaign of vengeance and suppression know no boundaries.

Its ubiquitous symbol is the red, black, white, and green Palestinian flag flown at every demonstration representing a homeland yet to be achieved. There are many admirable and even heroic elements to the resistance of fighting in outnumbered and out-gunned battles, groups which are secular and community based, many that profess non-violence, and

ones that possess a spirit of anarchism not enunciated but present, as well as small anarchist formations.

But in the category of careful of what you wish for, countries formed after the withdrawal of colonial powers have a sad and unfortunate history. One need only look at Nelson Mandela and the ANC and then South Africa today run by bureaucrats and kleptocrats. It's not that much different than long standing countries including the U.S., but after all the blood that has been spilled, can't a solution be devised other than another nation state?

No State.

Peter Werbe is a long time Fifth Estate editorial group member. He lives in the Detroit area and is the author of a novel and a collection of articles from this magazine.

[PeterWerbe.com](http://PeterWerbe.com)



## Gazan Youth Manifesto for Change

### GAZA YOUTH BREAKS OUT

[This cry for justice appeared in the Fall 2011 Fifth Estate. In almost 13 years, little has changed. The article is available in our online archive at [fifthestate.org](http://fifthestate.org).]

**Fuck Hamas. Fuck Israel. Fuck Fatah. Fuck UN.  
Fuck UNWRA. Fuck USA!**

**W**e, the youth in Gaza, are so fed up with Israel, Hamas, the occupation, the violations of human rights and the indifference of the international community! We want to scream and break this wall of silence, injustice and in-

difference like the Israeli F16's breaking the wall of sound; scream with all the power in our souls in order to release this immense frustration that consumes us because of this fucking situation we live in.

We want to scream and break this wall of silence, injustice and indifference like the Israeli F16's breaking the wall of sound; scream with all the power in our souls in order to release this immense frustration that consumes us because of this fucking situation we live in.

We are sick of being caught in this political struggle; sick of coal dark nights with airplanes circling above our homes; sick of innocent farmers getting shot in the buffer zone because they are taking care of their lands; sick of bearded guys walking around with their guns abusing their power, beating up or incarcerating young people demonstrating for what they believe in; sick of the wall of shame that separates us from the rest of our country and keeps us imprisoned in a stamp-sized piece of land; sick of being portrayed as terrorists, homemade fanatics with explosives in our pockets and evil in our eyes; sick of the indifference we meet from the international community, the so-called experts in expressing concerns and drafting resolutions, but cowards in enforcing anything they agree on.

We are sick and tired of living a shitty life, being kept in jail by Israel,





**There is a revolution growing inside of us, an immense dissatisfaction and frustration that will destroy us unless we find a way of channeling this energy into something that can give us some kind of hope.**

beaten up by Hamas and completely ignored by the rest of the world.

There is a revolution growing inside of us, an immense dissatisfaction and frustration that will destroy us unless we find a way of channeling this energy into something that can challenge the status quo and give us some kind of hope. The final drop that made our hearts tremble with frustration and hopelessness happened on November 3 (2011), when Hamas officers came to Sharek Youth Forum, a leading youth organization ([www.sharek.ps](http://www.sharek.ps)), with their guns, lies, and aggressiveness, throwing everybody outside, incarcerating some and prohibiting Sharek from working. A few days later, demonstrators in front of Sharek were beaten and some incarcerated.

We barely survived Operation Cast Lead [in 2008], where Israel very effectively bombed the shit out of us, destroying thousands of homes and even more lives and dreams. They did not get rid of Hamas, as they intended, but they scared us forever and distributed post-traumatic stress syndrome to everybody, as there was nowhere to run.

We are youth with heavy hearts. We carry in ourselves a heaviness so immense that it makes it difficult for us to enjoy the sunset. How to enjoy it when dark clouds paint the horizon and bleak memories run past our eyes every time we close them? We smile in order to hide the pain. We laugh in order to forget the war. We hope in order not to commit suicide here and now.

During the war, we got the unmistakable feeling that

Israel wanted to erase us from the face of the earth. During the last years, Hamas has been doing all they can to control our thoughts, behavior and aspirations. We are a generation of young people used to facing missiles, carrying what seems to be an impossible mission of living a normal and healthy life, and only barely tolerated by a massive organization that has spread in our society as a malicious cancer, causing mayhem and paralyzing people with its terror regime. Not to mention the prison we live in, a prison sustained by a so-called democratic country.

History is repeating itself in its most cruel way and nobody seems to care. Here in Gaza, we are scared of being incarcerated, interrogated, hit, tortured, bombed, killed. We are afraid of living, because every single step we take has to be considered and well-thought out. There are limitations everywhere. We cannot move as we want, say what we want, do what we want, sometimes we can't even think what we want because the occupation has occupied our brains and hearts so terribly that it hurts and it makes us want to shed endless tears of frustration and rage!

We do not want to hate, we do not want to feel all of these feelings, we do not want to be victims anymore. *Enough!* Enough pain, enough tears, enough suffering, enough control, limitations, unjust justifications, terror, torture, excuses, bombings, sleepless nights, dead civilians, black memories, bleak future, heart aching present, disturbed politics, fanatic politicians, religious bullshit, enough incarceration! *We say stop!* This is not the future we want!

We want three things. We want to be free. We want to be able to live a normal life. We want peace. Is that too much to ask? We are a peace movement consisting of young people in Gaza and supporters elsewhere that will not rest until the truth about Gaza is known by everybody.

We will start by destroying the occupation that surrounds ourselves. We will break free from this mental incarceration and regain our dignity and self-respect. We will carry our heads high even though we will face resistance. We will build dreams where we meet walls.

We hope that you will support us. To find out how, please contact us directly: [freegazayouth@hotmail.com](mailto:freegazayouth@hotmail.com)



When violent acts seem isolated, rash, inexplicably singular, this gives all those forced to witness or have knowledge of it a way out. To rest somewhat

easy in the knowledge that the particular and specific circumstances under which the violent acts took place are unlikely to reoccur.

So, what do we do with acts that are not only calculated, premeditated, intentional, but also collective? When the perpetrator is not one individual in a moment of extreme emotion or loss of all moral compass, but an organization of individuals (a state), who have come together with the sole intent of profiting in some way from bringing harm to others?

In Lola Lafon's *Reeling*, we encounter this form of organized violence. This is not a departure for Lafon, and she continues to bring insight to systems of oppression that disproportionately target young women and girls.

In her 2016 *The Little Communist Who Never Smiled*, for example, we step into the lives of children at the exact age when their bodies become fully feminized, therefore ceasing to belong to their inhabitants and are assumed to belong to the world. When breasts, hips, and lips begin to define the way you will live, how you will be treated, and what parts of yourself you can still claim and control. When your body ceases to be invisible and comes under the strict and watchful control of the state, the patriarchy, and the men and women who enable these systems.

Similarly, in *Reeling* we are privy to the transition from childhood to adulthood in a feminized body, through the inner life of Cléo, a young dancer, who is 12 years old when we first encounter her. When she is "twelve years, five months and one week old," she starts ballet classes. After struggling to fit in with the private school girls whose class privilege is constantly on display and trying hard to "acquire the refinement



The psyches of young girls  
& their resilience

## The Bad Victim: Letting go of the Ghosts

MARIEKE BIVAR

**Reeling**  
Lola Lafon,  
translated  
from French  
by Hildegard  
Serle  
Europa  
Editions  
2022

foundation that seeks out "exceptional" girls for scholarships in the arts. She has noticed Cléo and wishes to introduce herself.

Desperate to escape the chains of childhood, dreaming of a life dedicated to this precious art form that consumes her imagination, Cléo jumps at the chance to be considered for a scholarship. She believes something may be finally happening to her, the thing that will break her out of the waiting room of childhood and into the real world.

Cathy does not disappoint. She is an enigma. Worldly, but approachable. Soon she brings Cléo gifts: an expensive perfume, a beautiful new leotard, a special series of Polaroids ("remunerated," of course) to show to the foundation's judges... She sees something in her, and wishes only to support, to encourage, to help her fulfill her potential. Cathy meets Cléo's parents, making an excellent impression, tells them that their daughter might have a chance at a scholarship. Perhaps she could arrange a meeting with the Foundation's judges, an introduction.

Like Lafon's other work, this is not fantasy plucked from thin air. This is neither speculative fiction not historical fiction. While Lafon was writing *Reeling*, the details of Jeffrey Epstein's tentacle-like venture in the international sex-trafficking in under-

—Marieke Bivar

and haughtiness" her ballet teacher praises, she leaves dance behind. But after seeing a program on television featuring beautiful showgirls, Cléo's passion for dance is reignited, and she soon finds the "deliverance" of modern jazz classes at the local community centre.

Cléo is in the eighth grade, and longs to experience the freedom she feels while dancing in every aspect of her existence.

Leaving dance class one day, she meets a mysterious and glamorous woman. Flushed and out of breath, giddy with the power and pain of training and the carefully controlled expression of dancing, she is entranced.

The woman soon introduces herself as Cathy, the representative of Galatea, a



Lafon's timely novel, which also touches on questions of racialized bodies, queerness, and anti-capitalism, gives us another direction from which to approach issues of consent, exploitation, and agency.

age girls, involving many men in positions of power, continued to slowly be revealed in the press.

In Epstein's case, the media is generally interested in legalities (how young *exactly*, is young, what is the definition of trafficking, and how do you prove coercion?), as well as the identities of the famous men involved. But in *Reeling*, Lafon's focus is not on the men who it turns out are behind Galatea, nor on defining what kind of crimes they perpetrated. Instead, *Reeling* zooms in on the ways in which the so-called foundation's money and power is used to involve the trafficked girls themselves in their own abuse and that of others like them.

Lafon weaves in details that place us on the scene, and sometimes in the bodies of her characters. We sit at a long dining table with them as they chat nervously with the middle-aged men who make up the Galatea Foundation's panel of "judges." We lie on the examining table with them as a renowned physiotherapist tries to undo the damage they have done to themselves in the dance studio or on the stage: strained muscles, x and x. We stand in the schoolyard with Cléo, our stomachs churning, as she selects which classmates she will introduce to Cathy next.

Cathy is an important piece to the Galatea puzzle. A fictionalized Ghislaine Maxwell, she is the front line, the face of the operation. She grooms the young teens, buying them gifts, telling them they are very mature for their age, insinuating that they are destined for greatness if they can only "open their minds," to the world to which she will introduce them, a world in which she will abandon them once they have ventured in far enough.

Once Cléo finally extricates herself from the clutches of Cathy and Galatea, she is left with an immense inner struggle. Barely into her teens, she is preoccupied, almost obsessed with ideas of good and evil, right and wrong. She struggles to understand systems of oppression, what their existence means, how important it is to speak up for what is right.

This is a theme that readers of Lafon's other work will find familiar: a young girl who is trying to understand a world in which she and her body are continually scrutinized and judged, and how to build an inner sense of what is good and worthy, in short: how to become her own judge.

The name of Lafon's fictional foundation is based on a Greek myth, in which a sculptor falls in love with his sculpture, which then comes to life. This myth in turn inspired the play *Pygmalion*, later adapted for film as the hit musical *My Fair Lady*, in which a cockney flower girl is "sculpted" into an upper-class lady, at which point her "creator," or groomer, falls in love with her.

Lafon's intertextual reference to this myth, that of the right of the sculptor to take his sculpture as a lover, gets to the heart of *Reeling's* theme; these girls are told they have "potential." That with a little help, they can make their dreams come true. This is the coaxing, the sculpting, the grooming. Then, when their so-called benefactors ask for a little something in return, they are asked to endure sexual abuse in exchange. Having come this far, and already unsure who exactly has final say in how their bodies are to exist in the world, how can they refuse?

As Cléo gets older, she finds ways to reclaim her body. She continues to dance, has lovers, and is self-sufficient. She is self-contained in the way she has been raised to believe is right, and which her experience with Galatea has, of course, confirmed: in the end, she alone is responsible for her destiny.

When her daughter is born, she is filled with the old fear, the knowledge that she is a person who can bring harm to others. She sees one of her classmates, who was slightly younger than the other girls, in her daughter's face, and can't bring herself to provide the care a mother is expected to take on: feeding, rocking, comforting. "Needing help [isn't] a sign of weakness," her partner Adrien tries to convince her. But she cannot bring herself to accept that she is deserving of help, or that she should be allowed to move on from her past. "You [can't] just drop your ghosts," she thinks. "You [can't] just let go of their hands."

Lafon's timely novel, which also touches on questions of racialized bodies, queerness, and anti-capitalism, gives us another direction from which to approach issues of consent, exploitation, and agency. At a time when abortion rights and access other healthcare that gives people agency over birth control in the U.S. is being dismantled state by state, when parents and teachers are being told to carefully guard the gender expression of the children under their care, this book provides us a new story to base our next moves on.

Unlike the premise of myths like Galatea, *Reeling* does not glorify those with power over others. Cléo's story is about being trapped by and breaking out of the systems that seek to cast us and our bodies in marble. It is about her and all the other statues who come to life and fight back together against those who would claim them and keep them, resisting the systems of power that seek to control us down to the bone.

Marieke Bivar is living in Montreal, but hopes to one day inhabit the deep sea, maybe as some kind of translucent glow-in-the dark creature. May we see a free Palestine and a free world long before then.





# Justice in the World of The Punisher

**A Cultural History of The Punisher: Marvel Comics and the Politics of Vengeance**

Kent Worcester

University of Chicago Press, 2023

**PAUL BUHLE**

**L**iterally hundreds of comic books and graphic novels bear the imprint, directly and indirectly, of one luminous character: the Punisher. Most of us know little about this ultra-violent global icon who has been around since 1974 and continues to draw millions of readers. That the Punisher seems so deeply ambivalent, heroic or anti-heroic by turns, is obviously key to his status.

Operating outside the law, imposing his own decisions, he remains the most political of the Marvel characters, but political in a sense that most of us cannot quite grasp or accept as legitimate. The Punisher, like a character from a nineteenth century Russian novel, might easily inspire direct action against injustice, even action in the name of anarchist causes.

Worcester explains on the first page that this character, who sometimes seems to be channeling white, male rage, is also expressing the effects of shame and humiliation. Wounded masculinity here is to be illustrated if not quite openly celebrated, but in any case remains painfully unresolved. The ideal society presumably craved by his birth-name-identity, Frank Castle, remains elusive to the reader, and would in any case need to resolve an issue inescapable in the Punisher narrative: women's self-assertion.

Much as Punisher deals out endless blows to the persecutors of women, he cannot see gender relations beyond his narrow and violent perspective. And then again, who are the readers attracted to the Punisher? Males with the same limitations.

Punisher, Worcester tells us, is "at the center of one of the most significant developments in mainstream comic books over the last half century: the emergence (in the 1970s) and success (in the 1980s) of a new strain of (anti)heroism, one that promises carnage rather than benevolent intervention."

The world of superheroes at large has become, across the last two generations, a world of constant, organized violence. Yesteryear's Superman, Batman, et al., were restoring a peacefulness considered normal even in Metropolis or Gotham City. Across the last two generations, that normality has slipped away, and the

dangers do not come mostly from outer space or from abnormal abilities of deviants.

This development might easily place anarchism, the history and philosophy of anarchism, in another light. Acting outside of the law has been normalized. The problems and also the opportunities may be seen afresh. But first, the problems radiating through popular culture as well as politics and war, need to be viewed a little more closely.

The scholarly literature on comic art has mushroomed from slight, up to the 21st century, into several university series, many trade press items, and at least a couple of on-line journals. Not so long ago, non-PhD but scholarly-minded "fans" did the research and wrote the books and articles, as a concomitant to collecting, which itself gained new status with the rising money-value of old comic art.

So much more has been produced and is now being produced along the line of comics studies. Yet there has been no volume with this level of erudition on an individual, charismatic, best-selling character. They may be coming in preparation for academic career advancement or even the joy of younger comic-fans seeing themselves in print, but not here yet.

Marvel features have by now swamped Star Wars in every sense, and cannot fairly be charged with turning Hollywood back into cowboys-and-(alien) Indians. We are in the post-pop age, with signifiers outpacing anything specifically attributable to plot and character.

Without violence, where would the Marvel franchise be? The projection of teenage angst, especially a craving for some kind of revenge against some malefactor in a very sick modern society, is arguably the strain of continuity through comics since their revival in the 1970s.

The incredible twists and turns of salesmanship that found gay characters, black characters, anti-violence violence, also found (after a sixty-year lapse) open identification of Jewishness true to the field of artists and writers. Prolifera-



tion in titles and characters demanded variety.

The Punisher is the violent character who becomes increasingly so as publishers and readers continually reflect and redirect the scope of violence in the real world. Before 1970, with inevitable exceptions, violence could only be the action of the wicked, or performed, with caution, for purposes of good. Worcester argues that we find the cause of the Punisher at the dawn of Reaganism and the rhetoric of "violence in the streets" caused by racial minorities and others tolerated in the guise of social permissiveness. Logically, the Punisher makes his first appearance in 1974.

Who is Punisher aka Frank Castle? As Worcester explains, he may be a damaged veteran of the Vietnam War, in later generations, of the Iraq or Afghani conflicts. He learned how to beat and to kill, and walk away without being arrested. One could write him off as a rightwing nut. But Worcester sees him "as an overdetermined site of cultural production," the expression of his writers and artists. Literally hundreds of comic books and graphic novels

Worcester argues at length, and very persuasively, that the roots of this character can be found in the genre of the 19th century Western and closer in time, to the emergence of violence in hugely popular films. A fine scholar of the Pan African thinker C.L.R. James, Worcester missed an opportunity to plumb one of James's lesser works, an unfinished manuscript finally published after his 1989 death, pointing to the public clamor for revenge against the terrible effects of the Depression. "The Public Enemy," a huge surprise hit of the early 1930s, established the bad guy who would come to grief in the end, but lashed out at the falsity of social relations under capitalism.

The Punisher is a little like Edward G. Robinson, but not so emotionally needful, by a long shot. He is not robbing banks so much as bashing restless minorities on the streets. The social quality of the crime story so evident in 1950s-70s television shows, almost vanished in "Hill Street Blues" as the unworthy almost begged to be bagged, thumped, and put away. But those men (and some women) in blue believed at least in courts and prison sentences. The Punisher regards such measures as inadequate and downright cowardly. Real men take direct action.

Liberal democracy is hopelessly inadequate to the tasks at hand. Spider-Man and Daredevil, among other superhero types, only seek something that amounts of propping up a hopelessly decadent system. Punisher wants to overthrow the system, even if he has nothing beyond his own individual action to put in its place.

Punisher, popular enough to join the Marvel line-up during the 1980s-90s, not only brought in book-buyers, but encouraged brand expansion like t-shirts and posters. In the Reagan era, anger and resentment could be monitored if not controlled. By the 1990s, any remaining sign of Reagan-style optimism had apparently vanished. Vigilantism found its targets not only among street criminals, but also the elites. For a while, each new series became more bloodthirsty and

ruthless, then sales faded into a foggy if by no means liberal eclecticism. He got to join the Marvel Family as a sort of troubled relative.

In the end, all this winds down into parody and confusion, echoed in troubling successors like the Foolkiller whose world includes mass rapes, mass hangings and body parts, a new violence appropriate to the America of deindustrialization and widespread despair. The principal scriptwriter of *The Punisher*, Mike Baron, is asked at the end of the book what Punisher would do in the world of 2022. The answer is downright Trumpesque: stop the multicultural hordes at the border and take out the politicians in Washington.

If we needed a map of hell, perhaps the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of Punisher in 2024 would do as well as any. Marvel was sold to a conglomerate that apparently sold multivitamins and health aid materials with the same degree of enthusiasm, and then passed on to Disney. Three Punisher films succeeded only because associated media sales and broadcast/streaming rights brought in the money.

If it is hard to see where *A Cultural History of the Punisher* ends, that is because it does not end. The character will continue as long as demand makes still more replications and spin-offs profitable.

Capitalism, in his narrative, is obviously breaking down. Liberal democratic, that is also to say also social democratic, efforts at improvement have palpably failed. Something else is clearly needed. For Punisher, this is the perfect laboratory for something very much like fascism, or is it?

What is it for we who, likewise are skeptical about the State, believe in very different kinds of direct action and a different outcome?

Paul Buhle has edited fifteen nonfiction, historical comics since *WOBBLES!* in 2005. His latest is *The Jewish Labor Bund* from Between the Lines publishers. He lives in Providence, R.I.

## Next!

KAZ SUSSMAN

There ought to be a test  
to see if someone is suited  
to be a cop: a simple test  
of just one question.  
Do you want to be a cop?  
If the answer is yes  
kick their asses out the door.  
"Next!"

Kaz Sussman is a carpenter and disaster response worker who lives in a home he built in Oregon from abandoned poems. He has published in *Nimrod*, *Kingpin Chess*, *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, *Prodigal*, *The Healing Muse* and *Gastronomica*. [kazsussman.com](http://kazsussman.com)



# Academic Musicology & Its Revolutions



Louis Armstrong plays for his wife, Lucille, at Giza in 1961.

## Revolutions in American Music: Three Decades that Changed the Country & Its Sounds

Michael Broyles

Norton 2024

WILLIAM D. BUCKINGHAM

In his 1955 book, *America's Music*, Gilbert Chase raised a question that has remained of central concern to academic musicologists in this country ever since: What, exactly, is distinctly American about American music?

As the product of elitist academic institutions, musicology has traditionally been concerned with the study of art music—the musical traditions of elites, centered around courts, churches, and bourgeois parlors. Musicologists who specialize in American music have delighted in the innovations of American art music composers such as Charles Ives, Aaron Copeland, and John Cage. Meanwhile, musicians in this country have periodically transformed the world's musical cultures with radical new sounds such as jazz, rock and roll, and hip hop.

Chase and the specialists in American music who followed him have tried to explain what these different musical traditions share and what they might have to do with the idea of America. There's a nationalistic impulse at work here, and by and large, the answers given to these questions have not changed much since Chase's time.

In America, we're told, highbrow and lowbrow cultures interacted and cross-fertilized in ways that were not possible in the more rigidly hierarchical European cultural centers. These highbrow and lowbrow currents flow through a cultural melting pot, in which European, African, and (to a lesser extent, the story goes) Native American cultures circulate, each contributing certain elements

to the mix.

Michael Broyles's new book, *Revolutions in American Music*, fits squarely within this musicological tradition. In contrast to Chase's sweeping history, though, Broyles draws our attention to a few particular genres such as polka, jazz, and *avante-garde* classical music, in three decades: the 1840s, the 1920s, and the 1950s.

This allows room for concise but richly detailed depictions of some fascinating episodes in American music history. The history of early jazz, for example, the development of commercial country music and blues, as well as the rise of rock and roll in the 1940s and '50s are all treated with the enthusiasm and passion they deserve. These episodes are brought to life with biographical sketches of both well-known and lesser-known but influential figures, and illustrated with extensive quotations from contemporary newspapers and critics.

Broyles's interest in the "revolutions" of the book's title seems to lie exclusively in the metaphorical or aesthetic sense of the term, and the book generally tends towards a bourgeois and elitist perspective.

The reader is warned, for example, of the "virtually uncontrolled" crowds of "rowdy working-class men" who frequented the popular theaters of the 1840s. And the new immigrants who comprised these crowds "came willingly," according to Broyles, "seeking a new life" in America—a fairytale immigrant story that ignores the starvation, war and economic desperation that drove the emigration of Europe's working classes.

Broyles's elitism also colors his approach to music analysis. Throughout the book, white middle-class musicians are described as innovators, deftly taking advantage of new technologies or markets to change the musical "landscape" and shift the prevailing musical culture.

In his discussion on minstrelsy, for example, Broyles explains that the white



*Louis Armstrong studied opera arias and performed classical music with enthusiasm and expertise. His style represented a radical departure from what came before.*

performers caricaturing Black music and dance were creating a racist mockery. But he fails to see that the enslaved Black men who inspired them were themselves capable of social critique—that they might have been making fun of their captors’ culture with their exaggerated imitations of bourgeois dandies and ignorant bumpkins.

In another episode, the author provides an extensive analysis of the influential style of the early rock and roll pioneer Johnnie Ray. The Black blues singers who inspired him, however, are credited only with providing “rhythmic groove,” and “the sharp, nasal quality of the blues singer.”

Earlier crooners like Bing Crosby appear as innovators, in this telling, developing new vocal techniques suited to the new technology of the microphone and new middle class tastes. The success of Black blues pioneers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, however, is attributed to their “rough edges,” “deep, husky voice,” and “authenticity.”

Only white musicians, it seems, are capable of bringing any agency to their craft, while Black musicians’ success can only be attributed to their essential authenticity and innate expressive capacities.

This bias is most glaring in Broyles’s treatment of the jazz trumpeter and singer Louis Armstrong. Armstrong’s radical innovations are reduced by Broyles to his “powerful” sound and “organically” developed solos based on his “African roots.” It makes sense to look for African influences in this music, but framing it this way makes these African influences seem somehow organic or natural, and Armstrong’s virtuosic genius is reduced to an ill-defined racial essence.

What’s lost here is the ability to reckon with Armstrong’s artistry, resulting in a disappointingly shallow assessment of one of the most groundbreaking and influential musicians of all time. Armstrong, in fact, studied opera arias and performed classical music with enthusiasm and expertise. His style represented a radical departure from what came before for the way he integrated complex late-romantic harmonies with a virtuosic technique, groundbreaking rhythmic sense, and keen sense for thematic development.

Some readers may find the academic jargon unhelpful. Concepts like “ultramodernism” and “chaos theory,” serve to confuse this story, in this reviewer’s opinion, more than they help to explain it. They may be better served by Chase’s readable and lively classic.

Readers with some interest in academic musicology will probably be confounded by the sparse citations and recycling of other scholars’ research. They may find more value in the work of researchers that have undertaken more critical analysis of the topics that Broyles treats here in only a cursory manner: Eric Lott’s influential study of blackface minstrelsy,

for example, or Brian Harker’s work on Louis Armstrong.

Anarchists interested in the history of music in the United States and its connections with oppression, revolution, and liberation will have to look elsewhere, and a comprehensive account of the history of music in anarchist political movements will probably be welcome by many readers of this magazine. In the meantime, Ruud Noys’ survey of anarchist musical currents and DIY scenes, *What is Anarchism in Music?*, and Daniel O’Guérin’s collection, *Anarchism in Music*, offer invaluable forays into anarchist music history.

We will have to await the development of a more comprehensive anarchist musicology capable of bringing an anti-authoritarian libertarian perspective to the rich and multi-faceted history of American music.

William D. Buckingham is a researcher, musician, and librarian based in New Orleans. He is the founder and executive director of the Institute for Public Ethnomusicology. [publicethnomusicology.org](http://publicethnomusicology.org)

## Non Serviam

(to be read horizontally & vertically)

JOHN G. RODWAN, JR.

Not going to do it  
Or even pretend.

Go to church and swear  
Obedience to inscrutable  
Deities whose very existence  
Strains credulity?

Not going to do it  
Or even pretend.

Made-up stories starring  
Anthropomorphic, jealous  
Super-creatures with  
Terrible tempers  
Earn nothing from  
Reasonable people but  
Scorn and derision.

John G. Rodwan, Jr., essayist and poet, lives in Detroit.



2024 marks the 100th anniversary of the formal announcement of surrealism in the Surrealist Manifesto written by French poet, Andre Breton. It gathers strength today as it combines with anarchism to shout: ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!

## Surrealism and the Anarchist Imagination

Ron Sakolsky

Eberhardt Press, 2023

### DAVID TIGHE

“Contrary to prevalent misdefinitions, surrealism is not an aesthetic doctrine, nor a philosophical system, nor a mere literary or artistic school. It is an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom, and misery.”

—Franklin Rosemont, *André Breton and the First Principles of Surrealism*



*Surrealism and the Anarchist Imagination* is Ron Sakolsky's most recent book in a string of texts exploring different aspects of the fertile crossroads of surrealism and anarchism. It contains fifteen pieces, ranging from poems and collective manifestos to longer essays.

These pieces argue passionately that it is precisely at the crossroads of these two currents that surrealists and anarchists are at our rebellious bests. For that insight alone it is a very valuable book. Early on, the surrealists described themselves as “specialists in revolt”, and it is the spirit of total refusal that has kept surrealism a vital force for more than 100 years. The surrealist slogan, “All Power to the Imagination,” rang out in Paris during the revolutionary events of May 1968 and is still ringing today.

Throughout the book Sakolsky gives examples of the intersecting of anarchist and surrealist currents. From the anarchist/feminist/surrealist publication *The Debutante* to the visual art of Maurice Spira; from anarchist involvement in indigenous land defence to Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, which was influenced by and critical of surrealism.

In *Undoing Reality*, Sakolsky examines the surrealist concept of miserabilism and his related concept of mutual acquiescence. It is crucial for us to reject miserabilism: “a way of life rooted in the rigid assumptions of a status quo finality that constitutes ‘reality’” Sakolsky points to John Clark (and his surrealist alter-ego Max Ca-fard) as seeking “to subvert such realist thinking by examining the miserabilist basis of the ubiquitous popular culture meme of ‘It is what it is!’”

Clark argues “From the viewpoint of dialectical thinking, the crucial challenge is to see the ways in which things are not what



Toyen “La Guerre” (1945)

they are. It always is what it isn't and isn't what it is. Getting trapped in the world of ‘it is what it is’—what I call Isisism—is the royal road to delusion, disaster, and domination. The right road to illumination and liberation is what I call Isisintism.” The essay ponders the “question of why we are willing to surrender our individual and collective autonomy to the repressive demands of ‘reality’.” Equally importantly, it examines what tools anarchism and surrealism can provide us to resist and overturn this “absence of the will to revolt.”

*Free Jazz: Imagining the Sound of Surrealist Revolution* is the longest essay in the book and a tour de force of radical scholarship. It provides all the facts that you need, but suffused with rebellious energy. Surrealists value free jazz because “as a musical form of insurrection, free jazz improvisation is a convivial creative practice that fully embodies the surrealist search for a revolution of the mind (which pointedly includes a critique of the dreariness of the commonsensical in favor of an explosion of the insurgent imagination) and is emblematic of the flowering of its libertarian aspirations for society as a whole.”

Sakolsky points to these aspirations as having a



"particularly powerful resonance with the Black Liberation movement." Archie Shepp is an example given of a free jazz musician dedicated to Black Liberation who also had a strong connection to surrealism, but he isn't the only one. There is a long list of prominent figures within free jazz who have had short or long term connections with surrealism.

Joseph Jarman and Henry Threadgill were participants in the 1976 International Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago and both composed pieces specially for the exhibition. Doug Ewart's Sun Song Ensemble performed there as well. Pianist Cecil Taylor was in attendance at the exhibition and also contributed to *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, the international journal of the Chicago Surrealist Group. William Parker, who played with Taylor for more than a decade, is quoted in the piece as saying, "black surrealism is a vision that has come to me most of my life." Sakolsky invokes the potent mixture of radical political vision and the visionary power of the human imagination present in free jazz. "In combination, these improvisational acts can provide the sparks that ignite the powder keg of surrealist revolution."

*Opening the Floodgates of the Utopian Imagination: Charles Fourier and the Surrealist Quest for an Emancipatory Mythology* is another of the long essays in the book. It discusses the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century Utopian Socialist Charles Fourier who has been a figure of fascination for surrealists and anarchists alike. Sakolsky explores the history of surrealist engagement with Fourier starting at the very beginning of the Paris Surrealist group in the 1920s.

Fourier's refusal to be limited by political realism infuriated his later critics Marx and Engels but has endeared him to anti-authoritarians. Fourier dreamed so wildly that he imagined the political equality of women and coined the term feminism. He imagined a world of passionate attraction and refused to be limited by the tyranny of what is (deemed) possible.

The essay also discusses the rejection by progressive movements of mythology, which French philosopher George Bataille saw as one of the factors that lead to the spread of fascism. The lack of any emancipatory myth left a vacuum for the fascist nightmare. Recent translations into English of Bataille's journal *Acéphale*, as well as public lectures that he gave around the same time, have provided more detail of his thoughts on this subject. Sakolsky argues that Fourier could provide at least parts of an emancipatory myth for anarchists and surrealists. It is very heady stuff and a fascinating discussion.

The third long essay in the book is *Chance Encounters at the Crossroads of Anarchy and Surrealism: A Personal Remembrance of Peter Lamborn Wilson A.K.A. Hakim Bey*. It is a remembrance of Sakolsky's 35 year long friendship with Wilson. As the title implies, it provides details about Wilson's engagement with and critique of surrealism, and how Wilson's critiques encouraged Sakolsky's own explorations of the crossroads of surrealism and anarchy.

It is a touching tribute to Wilson, a long-time anarchist comrade of Sakolsky's, not to mention prolific author and contributor to Fifth Estate.

The shorter pieces in the book have a lot to offer too. *A Spark in Search of a Powder Keg: An International Surrealist Declaration* is a strong reminder that the surrealist movement is vibrant, not a dead historical art avant garde. It provides a glimpse of the internationalism of surrealism. There are signatories from the US and Canada, Central and South America, North Africa and the Middle East, Australia, and all over Europe. It highlights the surrealist spirit of total refusal in opposition to Canadian pipeline projects and the violence of the police. The declaration is a strong voice solidarity with Indigenous land defence and radical environmentalism.

It is well known that André Breton and many of the French surrealists had an interest in and affinity with West Coast Indigenous art. The declaration states: "as surrealists we honor our historical affinity with the Kwakwaka'wakw Peace Dance headdress that for so long had occupied a place of reverence in Breton's study during his lifetime before being ceremoniously returned to Alert Bay on Cormorant Island by his daughter, Aube Elléouet, in keeping with her father's wishes."

The authors also draw connections to outrage and resistance in response to the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis which occurred during the period that signatures were being gathered for the declaration. A postscript points out that it "was only fitting that in solidarity with the uprisings about police brutality kicked off by George Floyd's execution / lynching at the hands of the police, anti-racism protesters in the United States would take direct action by beheading or bringing down statues of Christopher Columbus, genocidal symbol of the colonial expropriation of Native American lands."

*Uncovering the Surrealist Roots of Détournement* is an excellent short examination of what the Situationist termed *détournement*, the subversive appropriation of popular imagery, usually a comic combined with radical text, and its roots in surrealist practice. The piece is accompanied by an example of contemporary anarcho-surrealist *détournement*, a collaboration between Sakolsky and John Richardson. The same image and 20 others, along with an introduction by Sakolsky can be found in their recently co-authored book *Surrealist Détournement*, published by Dark Windows Press.

*Surrealism and the Anarchist Imagination* benefits from a beautiful printing job by Eberhardt press and full color art throughout by Rikki Ducornet, Maurice Spira, Zigzag, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Sheila Knopper and many others, which contributes greatly to the effect of the book. Surrealist visual art is a powerful aid to help fire the anarchist imagination.

David Tighe is an anarchist, mail artist, and zine maker living in Alberta, Canada.



## NIGREDO

Our darkening world has dressed itself up in vestment of blue Void. Has lain on its self-discrowned head the lazy eyelid corpse. Vacuum abhorrent naturam. That's what they say. What they say. Forests burn in a world that has become an alchemist's fire. In this stage, our naked feet are frozen, are hard. And we watch with drooping gaze a silent shadow, drifting allway over Deep. Hope? The hidden bedbug, mere bit of lice. And the Spectacle has hired itself a team of talented, well-trained exterminators. We are vampirized by our own atmospheres here, sucked well and through by selfset traps.

Become, here at our so-called "the end of history", a dryest sack of goat skins. At bottom? We know no point of reference is to be found anymore, anywhere. No plan of action or belief can hold for us an untarnished promise. We claw at closing walls in anger, and then, we feel quite foolish. Performative affectations, signifying nothing? Our world is a ghostly derelict. She's lost at sea. And no one, no one, shall ever find her.

All has been savagely emptied of meaning by a machinic assemblage that we ourselves did summon. All kisses have gone skeletal, all Other is autumn wind. We are as like Mantis now—we always devour our own. Still, though our Joy has retreated, we at least retain a vague ability to enjoy the excitements of death, of de Sade. Before crooked smiles of a lightning strike, some still feel that grim yet perversely pleasurable shiver. A toad lapping at the fountain of collapse... Yet it is an ever-dubious meal, never enough sustain.

I wonder, will any of us still be able to find that elusive luciferian sublime hiding there, within our big and final death? Or has even that poetic organ utterly atrophied in us? Will our end be instead merely another anxious, oppressive disappointment? *Les ennuis de Maldoror...*?

## ALBEDO

Sole path? Is it? Perhaps our sidewalk still end on Elsewhere. Actually. Or at least on a Somewhere. Perhaps the



# The Alchemy of Revolt

STEVEN CLINE

sponsive and vacant Victorian ghost. Newly as a trickster gods, we could throw our greenish feces at the spectacles of the Spectacle. We could piss our stinking piss along all his fancy shoes.

It doesn't matter if this behavior changes anything in the grand scheme of things, no, it doesn't matter, not at all. If we manage to birth even one hint, manage to squirt just one tiny shimmer of humanity's previously evaporated joy from the stage of these mad sideshow performances? Then our act would be utterly, quite utterly worthwhile.

## CITRINITAS

Up from our self-dug pit, then. Let us go. Goblins and ghouls, we are. Were. As yet unaccustomed to the bright light of fetal hopes. Blind at first, yet slowly glimpsing Future's still multinodular forms. Some quiet suggestions, some vague hopes. More of us ascending aboveground than we ever expected, now. More than we ever guessed.

The fleshsurface of our palpated earth positively teeming with rebellious We. With mutual eros assemblages. Dreamers, all 'a forming, all 'a squeaking. Singing with one life-giv-



ing one lovely big NO. An eternal *no*—to all the loyal dogs of mutual acquiesce. An eternal *yes*—to the ascending sparrowflock signal of mutual aid. Forming a new insurrectionist egregore, hatching out a strange and shifty brew.

We didn't see the absolute aquatic ease of this bold river's flow before, no we didn't. And yet now, we can't even imagine how we ever could have missed it. Indeed, from the lightless depths of Capitalism's witching hour, one can hardly believe in the reality of a golden goose's chattering of an Otherwise. Unrealistic, stupid. And yet, the sun of Eros returns again, everalways. Utterly erasing all spotted movements of nocturnal joyless jellyfish, of depressive voids.

The birdboy vibrations of dawn's surgery chorus have replenished in us every ounce of our lost and vampirized blood, yes, we can hardly believe in the power that that previously darkened Other had over us now, that darkening Otherwise of nihilism. So, we soap ourselves up, so we shower. So, we clean our hair, put on our bacon and our eggs, so we are readied for the morning's new insurrectionist working. We conjoin all our lost collective powers, and begin finally to fight—begin to build.

## RUBEDO

Fresh breath, new movement. The feather and the fin. Ascending sign of gecko, scrawled from inside of a spurious cardboard heat and flame. There is a spiral of dialectical pain emerging out from a gap in the blackened teeth of our great Lion of Hegel. A herd of sheepskin dreamers, all? Separated yet reforming, rainbow-colored cells in the microscopic embraces of lover Ocean's jealous slap. Vibrations in a wind of cosmic interdimensional seeds. All sprouting surreality from our ominous viper's red nose.

Our revolution is as a schoolyard let loose in the heat of the Nile, she is half spectral and half mist. And the cloud of our unrealized moist Becomings reburrows itself in sticky sands, it reheats itself. Becoming glass becoming newly "the all glassy-eyed ones." A thousand luminous and overwrapped eyes, splintering high gathering fast. Hovering high and hovering in.

We've cast somnambulist hieroglyphics, from inside the rubber hearts of purest pufferfish clay. All undiscovered erotic organs we'd well-hidden now sewn deep on the blink, on every lip. In the dancendance of a newly ejaculated and allfragrant Now. In the rising semen river of our revolt, there stands a palm tree, swaying. Fold her wildly, my maybefuture. Get her fast in tune with this song, this most janky musics of the spheres.

Here, in our marvelous Wonderland of the ten thousand friendly phantoms, even one bastard squirrel can become its own aquatic opposite—the mackerel. And so can you, friendo. And so can you. So start up the old dreamachine, start it up. In the saucy universe next door, our surrealist revolution has already been utterly triumphant. Has always ever been, and it always ever will. In the universe next door, next door.

And Dream is the magickal crack through which we hear our lost lover Revolution whisper to us, scheme. We must widen her unholy crack, O living ones, we must unchain her moist deluge. Let all beautiful utopias seep out from her moist slit, chattering with an Eros unending...

Steven Cline co-edits the journal *Peculiar Mormyrid* and participates in an Atlanta surrealist group.

## ALFREDO BONANNO INSURRECTIONIST ANARCHIST 1937-2023

### ANDREA CHERSI

**A**narchist theorist and activist Alfredo Bonanno, a proponent of insurrectionary anarchism, died in December at his home in Trieste, Italy at age 86. Together with early 20th century anarchists, Errico Malatesta and Luigi Galleani, Bonanno was a comrade who greatly influenced Italian and international anarchism.

He began anarchist activity in the 1960s. In 1972, he published a single issue of *Sinistra Libertaria* (Libertarian Left) and was sentenced to two years in prison for content urging insurrection. He co-founded the magazine *Anarchismo* (1975-1994), and a publishing house with the same name.

In 1977, Bonanno published *Armed Joy*, a booklet which cost him more time in prison. He co-founded the periodical *Provocazione* (1987-1991). In 1989, he was arrested for a robbery in a jewelry shop in Bergamo, Italy.

In 1997, hundreds of anarchists were arrested following a bombing. Bonanno was charged with providing the theoretical basis for group accused of carrying out the act. Sixty-eight comrades were tried, but only seven found guilty.

In the early 2000s, Bonanno published the periodical *Senza Titolo* (Untitled). In 2009, he was convicted in Greece for an armed bank robbery, but released from prison a few years later due to his age. Bonanno published countless essays and reprints of the classics of anarchist thought and philosophy from the *Anarchismo* publishing house.

Despite being extremely divisive in the Italian anarchist movement due to his ideas and actions, he played a central role in the elaboration of contemporary anarchism, in particular, insurrectionism that favors affinity groups over formal organizations that engage in armed struggle against the state.

His publishing house, *Anarchismo*, continues and publishes classic books by Kropotkin, Albert Libertad, Max Stirner, Ernest Coeurderoy, Proudhon, Fourier, Rocker and many others.

Bonanno's *Anarchy and Insurrection* and *Anarchy and Work-erism* are available from Detritus Books [detritusbooks.com](http://detritusbooks.com) or AK Press [akpress.org](http://akpress.org).

Andrea Chersi lives in Italy. She has translated numerous anarchist titles into Italian.



Ranters, Diggers & Mystics Who  
Challenged Church Authority

# They once were rebels

**Resistance to Christianity: A Chronological Encyclopaedia of  
Heresy from the Beginning to the Eighteenth Century**  
Raoul Vaneigem, translation by Bill Brown

**BILL WEINBERG**

**W**hite evangelical Protestantism has for generations overwhelmingly been a force of deep reaction in this country and is poised, if Donald Trump regains the White House this November, to instate a situation such as depicted in Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (and its screen and TV adaptations).

This potential recently made a media splash when Trump posted to his Truth Social platform an ultra-creepy video entitled "God Made Trump," portraying a personification of him as Redeemer and Avenger sent by the Almighty. Ralph Reed, founder of the Christian Coalition, is hawking his new book, *For God and Country: The Christian Case For Trump*.

Under a restored Trump regime, evangelical Protestantism could play the same role that reactionary Catholicism did in the clerical-fascist regimes of Francisco Franco in Spain, Ante Pavelic in Croatia and, to an extent, Benito Mussolini in Italy, in which the state and the ultimate leader are sanctified, labor suppressed, harsh and repressive interpretation of Christian morality made law, and enemies of the state eliminated.

A contemporary example of such a clerical-fascist regime is Putin's Russia in which rights for women and sexual non-conformists are being rapidly repealed, even very indirect expressions of disagreement with the regime are severely punished, with the Russian Orthodox Church of Patriarch Kirill, a key propaganda pillar of the aggressive war in Ukraine. The church promotes a narrative of protecting Russian traditional values against Western liberal assault, and is in explicit alliance with the evangelical right in the U.S., despite the denominational gulf.

However, beside the usual role of Christianity functioning as a handmaiden of repressive state authority, heresies have emerged under its rule that have a long history of birthing rebellious groups. They are chronicled by Situationist Raoul Vaneigem in this comprehensive account of rebels, ranters, and millenarians.

In *Resistance to Christianity*, he traces a chronology from the heresies of the ancient and medieval periods, especially those in the Gnostic tradition that rejected the Church and worldly authority as inherently corrupt, through the millenarian movements that ultimately prefigured the Protestant Reformation, a



heresy that succeeded.

A key episode was the German Peasants' War of 1524, which had a spiritual and millennial aspect in the person of the revolutionary priest Thomas Müntzer. He was a contemporary of Martin Luther, who disavowed Müntzer as being far too radical with his call for expropriation of the aristocracy by the commoners. The peasant army flew a rainbow flag as a symbol of solidarity and hope, but were ultimately defeated by armed forces of the lords.

This spirit was also present in the revolutionary movements of the English Civil War of the 1640s. This period famously saw the Diggers, who in 1649 at St George's Hill pulled off what the historian George Woodcock called the world's first anarchist direct action, reclaiming land from the aristocracy for their collective farms, with a vision of the earth as a "common treasury for all." The Ranters of the same period were fiery mystical anarchists who rejected all worldly authority and Christian morality.

Both the Puritans and the Quakers also came out of this ferment, and have had a significant influence on our



"In the garbage pit" Soviet anti-religion propaganda poster by the Association of realistic artists, USSR, 1929

side of the Atlantic. The Quakers were deeply involved in slavery abolitionism, aiding escaped slaves through the Underground Railroad, and in later struggles for social justice, especially war resistance based on their pacifism.

The more militant abolitionism of the armed insurrectionist John Brown in the 1850s, of Harpers Ferry and Bleeding Kansas fame, was steeped in Puritan millenarianism. And, there is a stamp of this a century later in the Baptist and pacifist Martin Luther King Jr, seen in his famous invocation of the Old Testament: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

So, how did this trajectory warp into its opposite?

A turning point can be seen in the late 19th century with the rise of Biblical literalism in reaction to the rise of science, characterized by the application of a strict literal interpretation to scripture.

In the 1890s, the fundamentalist and populist politician William Jennings Bryan was a fighter for small farmers and laborers who sought to abolish the gold standard in the interest of working people. But he was on the wrong side in the 1925 Scopes trial, opposing the teaching of evolution in the schools. Battles still going on today a century later strongly echo such religiously-inspired themes.

The 1920s saw the formal, doctrinal establishment of fundamentalism. But the critical turning point was the weaponizing of the abortion issue by the Republican Party after the 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision. This culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, concomitant with the founding of the Moral Majority, comprised of conservative Christian political action committees.

This sealed the pact between the GOP and Protestant fundamentalism, with the fundis abandoning any remnant of economic populism to close ranks with neoliberalism and Reaganomics as the price for mainstreaming of their cultural-conservative agenda.

The surviving millenarian stamp in this new ultra-reactionary and Biblical-literalist form is particularly ominous. In the Book of Revelations, with which evangelicals are so obsessed, the foretold Apocalypse for John the Revelator, writing in the first century CE, was the fall of Rome. Jumping forward a millennium and a half to the English Civil War era, the prophecy was reconceived as overthrow of the aristocracy and lords of property, exemplified by the execution of the king.

For contemporary evangelicals and fundamentalists, the Apocalypse can be seen as a literal rain of fire and brimstone which state rulers now have the power to bring about through modern military weapons technology. The notion of believers in an imminent and literal Apocalypse getting anywhere near the U.S. nuclear arsenal is terrifying.

Despite his supposed love affair with Putin, the blustering, erratic Trump taking power in what is, after Ukraine and Gaza, a world at war, holds unprecedented risk of

escalation to the unthinkable despite those sectors of the left who view Trump as the less dangerous candidate because he would be less likely to get into a war with Russia.

Vaneigem's title, *Resistance to Christianity*, is in some ways more relevant and in other ways less than the author himself anticipated when he first wrote the book in 1994. Vaneigem ends his story with the 1789 French Revolution, saying that it brought about the "fall of god"—after which liberatory movements no longer had to resort to the vocabulary and iconography of religion. In an afterword for the new English edition, Vaneigem doesn't really rethink that, seeing the world as moving "beyond religion." This is, especially at this moment, entirely too optimistic.

On the other hand, secularism isn't sufficient to resist the MAGA variant of clerical fascism on its own. Resistance is going to have to come, in part at least, from within elements of Christianity, and others who view the struggle in spiritual rather than rationalist terms.

Hopefully, the contradiction will be too blatant for some of those rallying around the obviously irreligious Trump in the name of religion. Some lonely figures have indeed broken ranks, such as Russell Moore, once a top official in the Southern Baptist Convention and now author of *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call For Evangelical America*, warning that evangelism is becoming the antithesis of everything it supposedly stands for by embracing MAGA.

There are also pastors in the Black church who are keeping the MLK tradition alive, such as Rev. William Barber in North Carolina, who led the Moral Mondays campaign in that state against the overturn of civil rights protections and imposition of restrictions on abortion rights. And, there are Christians who are risking their freedom to assist desperate migrants on the southern borderlands. These are a reminder that there are other currents in the Christian tradition, broadly defined, than its most reactionary exponents now preparing a bid for total power.

The history chronicled in Vaneigem's book, as obscure as much of it may seem for contemporary readers, is well worth grappling with at this moment.

Bill Weinberg rants weekly on his podcast CounterVortex.







"The Garden of Earthly Delights," right hand panel of triptych. C. 1500. The painting is the cover image on Raoul Vaneigem's *La Résistance au christianisme*.

Why translate a 600-page book about ancient Christian rebels?

## A Fair Question

BILL BROWN

**W**hy did I translate Raoul Vaneigem's *La Résistance au christianisme: Les Hérésies des origines au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, originally published in 1993 by Editions Fayard, into English?

This is a fair question because, after all, the book is more than 600 pages long, not counting the bibliography and the index, and it's about a fairly esoteric subject: the so-called heresies that were identified (sometimes even fabricated), publicly denounced and ruthlessly persecuted by the Christian Church over the course of nearly 2,000 years.

My answer starts with the fact that Vaneigem, born on March 21, 1934, in Lessines, Belgium, and still very much alive today, was an important member of the Situationist International (the SI). Founded in Italy in 1957 by several small groups of European painters, architects, poets and filmmakers, the SI was unique in that its members believed

in the possibility of global social revolution at a time when virtually no one else did.

In the early 1960s, the organization evolved from a Surrealist-inspired avant-garde arts movement into a hardcore political grouping that was primarily concerned with updating Marxist and anarchist theories and practices for the modern era. By 1967, the SI had developed a new critique of modern capitalism ("the society of the spectacle") and reinvented the theory of proletarian revolution ("the revolution of everyday life").

The *situs* propagated their ideas and methods through a journal called *Internationale situationniste*, several books, and a number of scandalous provocations. The group was deeply involved in the protests, riots, and occupations that nearly toppled the French government in May–June 1968.

In the 1970s, after the organization had dissolved itself, the SI continued to have a profound influence on revolutionary politics and culture in the U.S., France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

In England, the undiminished power and attractiveness of situationist critique was revealed in a new context when it was adopted, simplified and sharpened by the clothes, lyrics and packaging designs of the Sex Pistols. Other classic punk bands influenced by the SI include Gang of Four, the Clash, and the Mekons. More recent adherents to situationist critique include the punk bands Pussy Riot and the Stone Temple Pilots, the editors of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, *Adbusters* and the organizers of Occupy Wall Street.

Raoul Vaneigem was one of the most important members of the SI, which he joined in 1961 and stayed with until 1970, when he resigned. During that time, he wrote several key situationist texts, including *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, first published in 1967 and most often translated into English as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

After his resignation, Vaneigem was overshadowed by the SI's co-founder and last remaining member, Guy Debord, who was an outspoken critic of his ex-comrade's lack of involvement in the organization post-1967, his eventual resignation and the works he published thereafter. As a result, comparably few of Vaneigem's nearly 50 books and more than 20 prefaces, afterwards, and articles have been translated into English.

To date, there has been only one major study in English of his life and work: Alastair Hemmings' *The Radical Subject: An Intellectual Biography of Raoul Vaneigem (1934–Present)*.

Vaneigem's post-SI work has covered a wide variety of subjects, including the Zapatistas, the Yellow Vests, and the Oaxaca Commune. But there is one subject to which he



has returned several times and with great intensity: religion, particularly the Christian religion and the heresies against which it fought. Perhaps this should be phrased the other way around: he has focused on heresies and their resistance to the imposition of Christianity upon the masses and at the point of a sword. Vaneigem has written nearly half a dozen books on this one subject, the longest and most important of which is *La Résistance au christianisme*. When I began the translation in 2006, none were available in English.

Vaneigem does not have a particularly good understanding of contemporary American society. In his epilogue to my translation, which was specifically written for it, he refers to Calvinism and the Protestant work ethic rather than to white Christian nationalism and the drive toward a theocracy in this country. But his book is very relevant to the religious cult that has arisen around ex-President Trump and his millenarian rhetoric about retribution.

Without help from such a source as Vaneigem, it is difficult to understand the extent and intensity of the zealous support (even adoration) for Trump by people who are in fact victimized by his vicious, fascist policies and actions.

There are other translators who have brought Vaneigem into English, but they are few in number. There's the ex-situationist Donald Nicholson-Smith, who has translated *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and several other works into English, and the team of Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson, who collaborated on the translation of *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit* (*The Movement of the Free Spirit*), to which *La Résistance au christianisme* is a kind of sequel and supplement. But when I first got interested in *La Résistance*, it seemed clear that no one else was going to take it on, and so I decided to translate it myself. I had my work cut out for me.

It should be noted that, for 15 years before I signed a publishing contract with Eris Books, my translation of *Resistance to Christianity* was available for free on my website (notbored.org). The manuscript was also copied and pasted to several anarchist websites, including the Anarchist Library, by administrators who believed that their readers would also be interested in its contents and relevance to contemporary society.

As a result, I received dozens of emails from attentive and enthusiastic people who had questions, comments, and/or corrections, and so I was able to improve the manuscript as well as be reassured that there was an audience for it. Though I have done so before, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for the help I have received along the way.

Bill Brown has been involved in the situationist milieu for nearly 40 years. He has translated numerous situationist texts and reprinted others that were no longer available. He lives and works in New York City.



## Photo-Senryu

A haiku in Irish and English

**GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK**

smachtíní  
comhéirí lag  
ár gceannairí

police batons  
collective semi-erection  
of our rulers

Gabriel Rosenstock is an Irish writer who works chiefly in the Irish language. He is a poet, playwright, haikuist, tankaist, essayist, and author/translator of over 180 books, mostly in Irish. He lives in Dublin.



**Call for Submissions for the Next**

**Fifth Estate**

**Anarchist Review of Books**

WE SEEK WRITING & ART RELATED TO LITERATURE INCLUDING  
REVIEWS, ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS, POETRY, & FICTION

Deadline: September 1

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**ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!**





## Florida bans books? Firestorm brings them right back!

**F**irestorm Books, a fifteen-year-old collectively run anarchist bookstore and community event space in Asheville, N.C., is sending back thousands of children's books banned from the Duval County Public School system in Florida.

The queer- and trans-owned bookstore has given away thousands of copies each of over fifty different titles exploring topics from racism and colonialism to social movement history and visionary organizing.

So far, volunteers have filled 600 requests for free book bundles from people across Florida. Shipments consist of six books each, plus short reading guides, two zines, and a "Trash Fascism, Not Books" sticker featuring a possum reading a copy of the banned book, *Maus*.

Firestorm has organized a network of several dozen grassroots partners such as indie bookstores, Food Not Bombs, mutual aid projects, and Little Free Libraries to help with distribution of the 22,500 copies. They've shipped about 60 boxes with approximately 60 books in each to these Florida groups.

The books themselves have an incredible story. In 2022, advocates raised alarm after Duval County school administrators ordered the removal of titles in the Essential Voices collection from classrooms and schools. These books were designed to update existing libraries with diverse and inclusive content featuring characters with a

variety of ethnicities, religious affiliations, and gender identities. Of the books that were permanently removed, more than half featured LGBTQIA+ characters or history.

In November 2022, the contractor who originally sold the books to Duval County contacted Firestorm and offered to ship rescued books for free if the bookstore would freely redistribute them to kids again. If Firestorm couldn't take them, the books were destined for disposal. "When we were told that these books were at risk of being destroyed, we knew we had to act," noted

"We see resistance to book banning as inseparable from the fight against fascism, which seeks to erase ideas as a precursor to erasing people."



Firestorm Books co-owner Esmé Joy.

Firestorm's website makes clear the motivation behind the campaign. "We see resistance to book banning as inseparable from the fight against fascism, which seeks to erase ideas as a precursor to erasing people."

Under the campaign name "Banned Books Back!," bookstore staff and community volunteers began shipping books removed from Duval County schools directly to kids in mid-January. The campaign is focusing on getting the books back to Florida, and so far has had overwhelming success in gathering requests from people there. If there are still books left in a month or so, Firestorm will open Banned Books Back! up to the next four states with the worst book bans after Florida: Texas, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina.

"We're working to return these books as an act of solidarity with the kids from whom they were taken," explained Beck Nippes, another Firestorm co-owner. "We hope the campaign can connect with, and contribute to, a broader antifascist struggle, because books bans aren't happening in isolation. They're connected to attacks on reproductive and gender-affirming health care in a climate of escalating violence against queer and trans folks, especially youth."

Kids and their allies in Florida can request free books through Firestorm Books' website at [firestorm.coop/bannedbooks](http://firestorm.coop/bannedbooks), specifying either picture books for ages 4–8 or chapter books for ages 8–12, and requests will be fulfilled through a series of volunteer book-packaging parties.

"We're expecting to spend around \$17,500 on postage alone," said Firestorm co-owner Glenda Ro, noting that Banned Books Backs is fully funded thanks to donations from across North America and beyond through the project's online campaign.

Among the banned books that Firestorm Books will distribute are award-winning titles such as *New York Times* bestseller and Newbery Honor



Book *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga, and Coretta Scott King Illustration Honor Book *Memphis, Martin, and the Mountaintop: The Sanitation Strike of 1968* by Alice Faye Duncan and R. Gregory Christie. For a full list of titles, see the website.

Yet as noted in the Banned Books Back! zine, "It's less about the content of each specific book. It's the notion that a few powerful adults can decide a singular—and singularly narrow-mind-

ed—worldview for everyone else, as part and parcel of them enacting actual harm and violence."

It's no accident that Firestorm took on this project, given its commitments as an anarchist and feminist collective to solidarity, direct action, and experimentation. As the Banned Books Back! zine asserts, "We need to collectively care for each other, and continually demonstrate the ways we can do that in the here and now. Yes, that includes

handing out free books, but it also includes self-organizing access to abortion services and hormones, lending bail and jail support, offering transformative alternatives to calling the police, sharing and growing free food, squatting buildings to create housing, and the list goes on, limited only by our imaginations!" Banned Books Back! is an encouragement to think and act for ourselves in the larger struggle for a world without fascism.



#### Stay and Fight

Madeline ffitch

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019

#### ANDREW/SUNFROG

"I began to identify as an anarchist nearly 20 years ago, after a demonstration where I realized that the people cooking the food, doing the dishes, and administering first-aid were mostly anarchists. Rather than a rigid political doctrine, I understand anarchism as an ethical stance focused on making justice and caring for each other without hierarchy, without asking permission from power-brokers, and with whatever tools we have available. I call on these ethics daily." —Madeline ffitch

**I**s a long-form creative writer from the anarchist tradition an anarchist novelist or an anarchist who writes novels? Is there such a thing as an anarchist tradition within fiction? I am not sure that these were the first questions swirling in my mind as I devoured *Stay and Fight*, the debut novel by Madeline ffitch.

The story, did, though, take me directly back to the 1990s and the founding of an explicitly anarchist land project in rural Tennessee. For a brief time, that same feral land project was an infoshop, the sprawling site of several small festivals, and the publishing hub for the Fifth Estate. *Stay and Fight* reminds that communal living and idealistic homesteads are a durable feature of numerous countercultures. The stories told here also remind, in stark, stunning,

and often hilarious terms, that we social creatures will smack into the hard wall of our limitations when we try to live in close proximity with our comrades.

The subtle, surreal, and miraculously anti-authoritarian aspects of the book come in the choices that ffitch makes as a narrative curator. Put plainly, the story gets told from multiple perspectives, with several main characters taking a turn at first-person storytelling. The novel makes no attempt to resolve or reconcile how jarring and juicy that this can be.

When the youngest character narrates, the story becomes as magical and fantastic as one might imagine, especially when this same character struggles with hostile encounters, neurodivergence, all mediated by an internal reality that is once more optimistic and marvelous than the real world might allow.

So often in mainstream media and social media, the culture wars get blasted in the most cartoonish of ways, but when culturally colorful and queer anarchists navigate small towns and Appalachia, these interactions are hardly reducible to slogans, denunciations, or memes. The myriad ways that ffitch forges these realities and surrealities are at times comic and chaotic, especially as we learn how the main characters negotiate conflict among themselves, even as they are each misfits and radicals compared to their larger social structure.

Anarchist idealisms in the past have come to die in utopian communes, when more rigid ideologies cannot suffer under the interpersonal and basic life realities of rain and snow, fights and finances, critters and compost. The ways these characters desires and dreams grow, falter, and evolve amid all of that are truly energizing and believable, even when they face outward struggles such as natural gas pipelines that have been a focal point for environmental radicals in this century.

As someone who moved to a rural area with similar dreams, but also was forced to change and adapt, I fully endorse the underlying idea of beautiful but difficult relationships, of deciding to stay and fight.

Andrew /Sunfrog writes frequently for the Fifth Estate.





from police surveillance footage

## Police Dirty Tricks in the Name of Anti-Terrorism

# The State is the Real Threat

**Manufacturing the Threat**  
Dir: Amy Miller, 2023

**JEFF SHANTZ**

**J**ohn “Omar” Nuttall and Amanda “Ana” Korody were arrested July 1, 2013, after planting what they had been led to believe were functional pressure cooker bombs on the grounds of the provincial legislature in Victoria, British Columbia. Their arrests eventually led to the revelation of years of police dirty tricks, manipulation, and abuse in the name of anti-terrorism.

The couple lived two blocks from my home. As an anarchist, and police abolitionist, as well as a criminologist who lives and teaches in Surrey, an integral part of Metro Vancouver, I gave police actions serious attention and scrutiny. Almost immediately it became clear that this was a contrived setup by the cops.

In the court cases that followed, my suspicions were confirmed. What the RCMP, the Canadian national police force, presented as an extremist Muslim terror attack, uncovered by their so-called Project Souvenir, a five-month covert investigation, was a police fabrication—a shoddy effort to both take advantage of anti-Muslim panics and the marginalization of a poor couple who struggled with drug use. It

was a cynical effort to expand RCMP resources for community surveillance and pacification under the fear of anti-terrorism in a period where some of the post-9/11 mania was shifting, and police practices were being questioned. Unfortunately, it cost Nuttall and Korody years of imprisonment.

Director Amy Miller’s “Manufacturing the Threat” is a necessary and compelling work that puts the Nuttall and Korody case at the center of a broader examination of political policing and repression in the post-9/11 period. Its main strength is drawn from the extensive interviews with Nuttall and Korody who have understandably spoken little, beyond court dates, on what the police specifically subjected them to. Miller also makes effective use of police surveillance footage.

The documentary adds to the understanding of police and security apparatuses and the strategies, tactics, and deceptions they deploy to extend their powers and increase their resources and budgets. It offers useful insights into anti-terror policing (and police mobilized terror panics) as part of state regimes of social control more generally. It details the hand-in-hand workings of the RCMP and Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS). The focus on the Canadian state is welcomed given that much more has been produced regarding the U.S. state context in this regard. It is a work that should be of interest especially in this period of



## The poignant display of **the harrowing, torturous, heartbreaking, experiences of Nuttall and Korody**, makes clear the abuse they were subjected to by the RCMP.

rising movements acting to defund and/or abolish police.

Miller puts on poignant display the harrowing, torturous, heartbreaking, experiences of Nuttall and Korody and makes clear the abuse they were subjected to by the RCMP. In doing so, she tells us much about the rot at the heart of policing cultures. Horrifically, Nuttall speaks of being brought to the point of considering suicide because of police pressures during the entrapment. The couple still suffer PTSD from these events.

Through historical discussion and analysis, Miller effectively details the always ongoing political role of the RCMP. More than an everyday crime fighting unit, the RCMP originated as a colonial force and developed through policing of social, especially labor and anarchist/leftist/socialist, movements. All the while ignoring Nazi and far right movements, as remains the case today.

Despite the Canadian focus, there are insights to be gained for viewers elsewhere. American viewers will see connections with political policing in the U.S., such as the FBI's infamous 1960s and '70s COINTELPRO program of infiltrating and disrupting radical groups. It is perhaps the best-known case of police use of entrapment, informants and agents provocateur. The RCMP evolved their own practices, including document destruction, in light of the criticisms of COINTELPRO.

Viewers in the UK will see points of resonance with the "spy cops" case scandal where undercover officers infiltrated over 1,000 leftist groups between 1968 and 20120. Police agents lived in activist communities for years, even having children with activists, a situation that led to lawsuits for sexual assault since women did not know they were having sex with cops and could not have reasonably given consent.

Miller's choice to make connections with police repression of Indigenous land defenders is significant, too. Similar dirty tricks were used by U.S. cops, dating back to the Red Power movements and Wounded Knee of the 1960s, but more recently in policing of Indigenous resistance to the Dakota Access pipeline. This includes the discursive and material shift to frame land and water defenders and direct-action ecology movements as eco-terrorists.

Unfortunately, the documentary says nothing about the secretive Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), a unit of the RCMP which specifically acts as a security force for extractives capital. C-IRG has received much condemnation recently for its violence and abuse against Wet'suwet'en pipeline opponents and actions against clearcut logging at Fairy Creek in British Columbia.

Despite this there are some important limitations. The documentary overlooks local histories of opposition to the RCMP. For instance, Miller did not interview people

in Surrey who have been organizing against the RCMP for years including several anarchists who could have provided specific interesting insights. Members of the group, Anti-Police Power Surrey, for example, could have spoken about surveillance and suppression efforts by the RCMP in that city that targeted land defenders and environmentalists organizing against road construction as well as anti-Olympics organizers in the years right before the Nuttall and Korody arrests.

Miller missed an analysis of how social war policing is rooted in repression of working class, Indigenous, racialized people and communities in specific local settings. That it is interlinked with the broader national security issues and the wielding of anti-terror policies and panics she focuses on. Poor bashing and anti-drug user fear politics were a big part of local framings of the Nuttall/Korody case.

The BC RCMP are headquartered in Surrey and is the largest municipal division in Canada. There is even an established Surrey Model of policing, rooted in intensive and intrusive surveillance of communities through integrating policing with non-police agencies. This is social war policing—policing as pacification of oppressed people and communities. It includes those social services organizations, health care, housing, etc., to poor people and drug users.

Poverty and homelessness, and lack of social resources for poor and unhoused people in Surrey, played important parts in the police targeting of Nuttall and Korody. A key part of the public demonization of the couple involved their landlord allowing reporters into their home following their arrests. This was an act of poor bashing in which they were deemed problematic by the "unkempt" state of their residence.

Surrey is at the center of racist and xenophobic narratives throughout BC. It is also a place where racialized communities, Sikh and Muslim, are targeted for layered policing practices, from schools to community centers, to malls, to neighborhoods. Racist anti-gang policing also plays major parts in this. Unfortunately, Surrey, and its policing, comes off merely as wallpaper in the film, a backdrop. In reality, it is an important part of the story itself.

One final caution for anarchist viewers. There is a rather liberal approach in the documentary. It expresses a concern for liberal democracy, police overstepping their bounds, promises of reform. Anarchists know that the capitalist state is the threat. It is doing what it was designed to do.

Jeff Shantz is a longtime anarchist. He currently lives in Surrey, so-called BC (unceded Kwantlen, Katzie, and Semiahmoo territories) and organizes with Anti-Police Power Surrey and the Defund 604 Network.





## *If only the Luddites had won*

**Blood in the Machine: The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech**

Brian Merchant

Little, Brown & Company, 2023

**ROBERT KNOX**

**A** February arson attack by a mob of Lunar New Year revelers in San Francisco on a Google driverless taxi, to the cheers of onlookers, brings to mind the early 19th century assaults on factories and industrial machines by newly-marginalized workers who came to be known as Luddites. The attempt of these workers to hold on to social solidarity and community is the subject of Brian Merchant's timely offering.

I didn't pay enough attention to the subtitle. On the front flap, we're given this summary: "the story of the first-time machines came for human jobs—and how the Luddite uprising explains the power, threat and toll of Big Tech today."

There are two problems with that precis. Machines don't come for our jobs, at least not until the AI robots take over; machines don't do anything on their own. It's the billionaires who seek to eliminate human workers and replace them with hi-tech replicas—the algorithms, self-driven vehicles, endless assembly line speed-ups, and union busting that eliminate jobs and oppresses workers. It's Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and their ilk.

Merchant says this in his book's Afterword: "Robots are not threatening your job. Gig app executives who sense an opportunity to evade regulations and exploit tradition-bound industries are threatening your job."

What's happening today, right now, not what the Luddites did over two centuries ago is the purpose of this book. You can tell. When the author gets to the current day, the writing becomes urgent, the author's voice stronger, the message clearer.

Still, the rationale for writing this book is expressed in that subtitle "the ori-

gins of the rebellion against big tech." These origins lay in the Luddite violent response to the new machines that were mechanizing the processes of making fibers into cloth, and cloth into clothing.

This mechanization sacrificed quality, but also undermined the work that skilled English craftsmen (and women) had performed for centuries, generally in their own homes. The skilled weavers formed a kind of artisan middle class in the countryside of England's prosperous industrial North. England long dominated the world market in the production of textiles and in the early 19th century began importing American-grown cotton (grown by you-know-who) as a further stimulus to its own prosperity.

Whitney's cotton gin caught the attention of the money-making class in England, these artisans faced the loss of their livelihood. The *nom de guerre*, Lud, was used by the guerrillas struggling to preserve their jobs and the way of life of England's textile artisans by destroying the new, larger machines gathered into factories hurriedly thrown up by profiteering owners.

If they destroyed the machines, night-raiding bands of workers reasoned, literally breaking them apart with heavy hammers, the owners and merchants would have to restore the old way of producing cloth. The artisans would keep their skilled jobs, the source of their economic self-sufficiency, social status, and self-respect. They lost all of these material and social goods when they became laborers, made to work long hours on what were comparatively menial tasks that could be performed by children.

In fact, the tasks of serving the new machines often were performed by children. When weavers refused to give up the satisfactions of performing high-quality skilled work and become mere cogs in the big machines of the factories, the owners hired children (often procured from orphanage workhouses), working them to death by long



days and poor conditions.

The similarities of this birth of the Industrial Revolution to the current day's technology revolution are worth pursuing, although the connection is more analogous than causal. Struggling to preserve their way of life and the ability to support their families, weavers petitioned the English Parliament for material relief, food, and workplace protections. Many had their rights to the use of common land taken away by the Enclosure Acts of the previous generation.

But Parliament was a rich man's club, its agenda controlled by the men of wealth who built the factories. While the workers who banded together to raid factories, destroy machines and sometimes burning down buildings, had many local successes, scaring off some would-be factory owners, the British government responded to their cries for assistance by increased repression. Government spies eventually infiltrated Luddite cells, soldiers killed workers in one highly publicized shootout, and some Luddite leaders were jailed, tried, and hanged.

Merchant's book covers only a narrow spectrum of labor history. Anyone interested in the history of workers' insurgency can find it in books like Jeremy Brecher's *Strike!* and his anthology, *Root and Branch*.

The recorded history of the Luddite movement reads like a series of incidents that amount to a failed rebellion. Nevertheless, they were relevant. The "explosive campaign" of Lancashire Luddites, for example, "delayed the mass adoption of power looms for several years." Some of their tactics, Merchant tells us, were "novel and influential."

As if searching for relevance or some stronger hook to claim our attention, the book swerves into an account of famous and glamorous figures of the period, namely Lord Byron and Mary Shelley. Byron stood up in Parliament to defend the right, and necessity, of displaced workers to look to government for relief. Parliament found it easier to blame the victim. Besides, the Luddites' acts of violence resembled the French Revolution. More intriguing is Merchant's notion that Mary Shelley's conception of Frankenstein's monster draws on her society's fear of the machine as an inhuman, unstoppable force.

The 19th century factory, Merchant writes, closely resembled England's "poorhouse... or a jail." More interesting is the book's swing, after three hundred fifty pages, to the abysmal working conditions in today's factories, warehouses and other dangerous jobs.

Merchant discusses a 2018 Facebook post by livery driver Doug Schifter: "Companies do not care how they abuse us so long as the executives get their bonuses," Schifter wrote in an attack on the replacement of unions and small independently owned companies by the low-paid contract workers of "gig app corporations like Uber" and the politicians that empower them. This critique of gig app companies exposes their war on unions, the changes in workplace law

that allows corporations to abuse workers as they further concentrate wealth in the hands of the few, and the stunning lack of governmental and regulatory response not much different from 200 years ago.

The belief that new technology and the progress it allegedly brings must always be protected over the interests of change's victims, regardless of the social consequences and the threat to democracy posed by the power of concentrated wealth is the true value of *Blood in the Machine*. The real question the Luddites' history raises is this: If we don't wish to pay with our own blood to stop, or slow, the economic and political trends that constitute the contemporary machine, what paths are available to us?

Robert Knox is the author of *Suosso's Lane*, a novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and *Kapra Talesman*, a work of speculative fiction scheduled for publication in 2024. As a freelance journalist he reports for *The Plymouth Independent*.

## The New Epoch

### MYCLE

We are entering another new epoch.  
Things will only get far worse/much better from here.  
No more trying to find the light or poke holes in the  
darkness. That time has passed.  
Nor do we resolve ourselves to moving slowly through  
the night.  
No, let's just let our eyes adjust.  
Eat carrots.  
We'll move in and out of time and plot quietly under the  
cover of dusk.  
Relearn and reimagine black magic and martial arts.  
Plant seeds and go off grid.  
They told us not to stare into the abyss, but we never  
dealt well with authority and are not so easily controlled.  
Let's let the abyss envelop us.  
We are a glitch in their algorithm.  
That transvaluation of all values someone once thus  
spoke of.  
A new species.  
A better world might still be possible,  
but wouldn't you rather give birth to a whole other  
dimension?  
Slow dance in the dark with me.

Mycle is an anarcho pirate vegan feminist Taoist artist and activist born in the bowels of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.





## In the Digital Age Poetic Reason as an Alternative

Poetic Reason in the Age of Digital Control  
Jesús Sepúlveda  
Bad Idea Publishing, 2023

OLCHAR LINDSANN

**J**esús Sepúlveda's *Poetic Reason in the Age of Digital Control* addresses some of today's most pressing threats and sketches out some promising ideas of a strategy in response, which will hopefully be elaborated in future works.

Most of the book is devoted to describing the threats of ecological collapse, economic exploitation, neoliberal colonialism, rising totalitarianism, and a widespread failure of empathy. These phenomena are attributed to the root cause of the unrestrained rule of instrumental reason: "eclipsed by its reduction to an instrument—a tool that performs calculations," a totalitarian force leveraged by industries, bureaucracies, internet algorithms, and now by AI technologies.

The precise nature of the proposed response, poetic reason and its methods, is less developed, and sometimes gets lost amidst rhetoric or peripheral details. Sepúlveda bases his conception of poetic reason on an essentialist perspective, declaring that because "Nature's experience is unmediated, so is poetry, whose gratuity is not commodifiable because one cannot sell one's experience."

The examples of poetic reason offered, while relatively few, are drawn from a wide range of regions across the globe, including the animism of Amazonian indigenous peoples, and the balance of instrumental and poetic reason displayed in the construction of a windmill from recycled material in Malawi, in Kamkwanba and Mealer's memoir *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (albeit twice mis-cited as "*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wing*").

The precise nature of poetic reason nonetheless remains ambiguous and receives less attention and detail than the description of the general geopolitical situation. Some of this context is necessary, and the various factors of the global

situation are persuasively woven into a strong critique of instrumental reason. The basic analysis will be familiar to anyone with a knowledge of green/anti-civ anarchy, Fifth Estate, or much of avant-garde poetics. However, this context takes up about three-fourths of the compact book. The focus shifts fully from describing the problem to presenting a solution about ten pages from the end, leaving little room for an in-depth exploration of poetic reason itself.

It is never made clear precisely what poetry itself, or by extension poetic reason, is for Sepúlveda. The relatively few poets cited, including the powerful examples of Vallejo and Paz, give some indication, but the reader trying to discern the exact nature of poetic reason's revolutionary core is left mainly with familiar, essentialist declarations of poetry's special purity. But what makes the reason of poetry more pure than that of prose? What constitutes its essential, radical nature: its speakable rhythms, its sensuous form? The social roles of the poet? Its evocation of imagery and symbol? Its alteration of the writer's and reader's state of consciousness?

It is never explained in what way poetry, a product of language, arguably mediation par excellence—is unmediated. Sepúlveda declares that "Written verses mediated by the market are not poetry," but it is unclear whether this is part of the working definition of poetry, a turn of rhetoric, or a practical call for gatekeeping against the selling of all poetry. For instance, does selling a poem disprove this definition? Would this include zines? Busking? At least several of the poets he cites as inspiration have sometimes sold their poetry.

Sepúlveda certainly makes a strong case for the necessity of poetic reason, however defined, raising key questions: how exactly might we begin to cultivate it individually and/or culturally? How is it learned, how is it practiced beyond the confines of poetry itself? What are some strategies whereby it can combat systemic misery?

These questions have been energetically explored for generations, but there is no discussion of them here, nor of the multiple histories of anti-instrumental poetry, or analysis of the social roles or forms that characterize modern poetry.



No account is taken of poetry's evolution and its variety in countless societies, seemingly taking contemporary bourgeois culture's understanding of poetry for granted as a static concept.

Therefore, the idea of poetry that seems to be at play reflects the dominant model of lyric poetry which permeates bourgeois culture, regarding the purity of individual expression, its relation to mimesis (the representation of reality within art) and the social, cultural, and spiritual roles of the poet.

As a result, we miss the opportunity to explore some of the clearest, most developed, and most marvellous modes of poetic reason, including mysticism, ritual poetry, glossolalia, and shamanism. Though Brazilian Amazonian animism is offered as an example of the result of poetic reason, there is surprisingly no mention of their poetry, song, or use of language.

The modern movements and traditions which have explored this territory present an additional missed opportunity; despite the main concerns of Sepúlveda's thesis seeming apparently congruent with those of Romanticism and Surrealism, neither is mentioned. The poetic experiments and experience of Dada, Fluxus, the Situationists, Ethnopoetics, and asemic writing, despite the strong anarchist ties of all these movements, plus the theories of anarchist and radical linguistics and semiotics, currently thriving, are all missing from the discussion, aside from one reference to Debord's theory of the Spectacle. Explaining the reasons that Sepúlveda is, one must assume, dissatisfied with these approaches might go far in clarifying his own ideas.

The most intriguing aspect of the theory, which comes through in glancing hints and touches, concerns the relationship between poetry and time. Sepúlveda sees poetic reason as coun-

teracting the linear time wielded by instrumental reason, leading to some thought-provoking notions regarding poetry, history, and chronology.

These scattered ruminations make one yearn for a more focused and fully manifested explanation. *Poetic Reason in the Age of Digital Control* stands as an eloquent critique of the pressing problems facing us in the current historical epoch and evokes a brief sketch of some ideas pointing toward a promising response.

It leaves the reader with a keen hope for future books that will flesh out this sketch into a fully articulated theory, which can provide us with a potent source of strategies for radical poetic reason and action.

Olchar E. Lindsann is a poet, theorist, publisher, translator, archivist & historian of 19th Century radical and avant-garde counterculture. He is the editor of the DIY *mOnocle-Lash Anti-Press*, with a catalog of over 200 zines at [monoclelash.wordpress.com](http://monoclelash.wordpress.com).

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**I**n his 1920 essay, “Anarchists and Communists,” journalist, engineer and author Andrei Platonov wrote “True Anarchy is the understanding that all power and authority on Earth is unnecessary and harmful, that people do not need to be led.”

Platonov evidently devoted much time and thought to exploring the effects of the 1917 Russian Revolution upon its native participants sense of themselves as historical actors. His novels and stories are full of characters grappling with the ways in which the revolution both granted freedoms and took them away.

If you want to feel something of the apocalyptic quality that social transformation had on its adherents, there may be no better place to start with than *Chevengur*, his longest and most ambitious novel. It’s there where it is most immediately clear why the Communist authorities suppressed Platonov’s writing and, in his anguished exploration of the debilitating effect of the distance traveled between ideal and reality on the believer, that he most clearly anticipates the Revolution’s failure.

Readers coming to Platonov must accommodate themselves to a prose style that appears to have more in common with modernist 20th century stream of consciousness writing than say, the heightened emotional realism of Dostoevsky or Turgenev, but Platonov is no modernist or avant-garde.

Instead, traditional writerly goals of description and action are simply less important to him than depicting the inner psychic life of his characters. His blending of technical language with the colloquial speech of peasants, proletariat, and Bolshevik, creates a remarkable poetic effect, the disassociation of language from its familiar use mirroring the new zones of freedom created by the destruction of traditional boundaries and social roles in the wake of the Revolution.

It’s a useful shock to understand that Platonov’s characters can speak of and understand commu-



Vladimir Stenberg, Georgii Stenberg, poster for film *Man with a Movie Camera*, dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929

## A Russian Village Where the Revolution Went to Die

LAWTON BROWNING

*Chevengur*  
Andrei Platonov  
NYRB 2023  
Originally published  
1929

nism as an actual physical object, something with a distinct taste or feeling that can be held, found, molded, created or changed. This idea and many of the more seemingly outlandish theories present in the novel, such as the belief that one may kill without guilt in anticipation of human resurrection or the anticipation of solar and wind power as inevitable replacements for human labor, emerge not from poetic notions, but from Platonov’s own experience’s as an engineer and scientist.

It comes as well from the ideas of 19th century Russian philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov, whose unique blending of scientific positivism, Christian mysticism and labor and communist theory whose influence on Platonov is lucidly discussed in the contemporary writer Vladimir Sharov’s essay “Platonov’s People,” that is appended as an afterword in the new NYRB edition reviewed here.

*Chevengur*’s microcosm of Utopia might almost be hilarious were it not so heartbreaking, sometimes resembling the social satire of pes-

simists like Jonathan Swift in its deadpan insistence on taking the theories of communism to their absolute literal conclusions.

Take the abolition of labor which has been removed in *Chevengur* (the novel’s namesake and the fictional village where most of the latter part of its action takes place) for instance. One character explains it, as “a surviving remnant of bourgeois greed and animal exploitative voluptuousness, since labor led to the creation of property and property to oppression. The sun itself issued rations entirely adequate to support people, and any augmentation of these rations through deliberate human labor merely fed the bonfire of class warfare, since it led to the creation of superfluous harmful objects.”

Never mind then that these superfluous harmful objects are often living men and women. In order for *Chevengur* to be made ready for its utopian state, the town must be prepared, first by violently evicting and murdering the bourgeois class, then relocating the “half bourgeois” or middle-class to a camp outside of town and finally, in one of the novel’s most chilling



passages, casually massacring them by machine gun.

Eventually, Chevengur is entirely emptied except, in an echo of the Christian myth, by eleven Bolshevik apostles. Urged to go out and find proletariat to repopulate the town, one party member returns with a people completely stripped of life by hunger and want: the others, "worse than proletariat; no one and nobody."

Motherless, fatherless, and "born with no possibility of any gift," the others are the intended raw material of the new Communist world, yet they are so starved for food and human contact that they cannot function as human beings, let alone builders of the revolution. In the end, the experiment is doomed to failure. An ambiguously described force, perhaps the counter-revolutionary Whites or a Bolshevik detachment sent to cleanse the town attacks and kills all the inhabitants.

Platonov's depiction of his characters struggles with the internal contradictions of the Communist project constitute the heart of *Chevengur*, but his main pre-occupation in all his work is the problem of happiness. This question of whether contentment can co-exist with the revolution is debated spiritedly throughout the novel. In a characteristic passage, an inhabitant of Chevengur exclaims:

"The moment there is bread and property, that's the end of every true human being... Thought loves grief, it loves lightness... Has there ever been a time when people with

well-lined stomachs have lived in freedom?"

In other words, the moment that the revolution expends its last bit of energy destroying the old world and must begin the process of rebuilding it, it becomes decadent. Platonov's revolutionaries are caught in trap of their making, unable to ever meet the impossible requirements they have set for themselves. The psychic cost of this internal contradiction is movingly described in a passage referring to an inner being called the "Eunuch of the Soul" whose anguish anticipates the parables of alienation found in later writers like Kafka:

"Inside every man there also lives a little onlooker. He takes no part either in his actions or in his suffering and is always dispassionate and always the same. His work is to see and to witness, but he has no say in a man's life and no one knows the reason for his solitary existence."

*Chevengur* has much to tell us about the fate of those who choose to sacrifice everything for a dream. Perhaps it is only thanks to such onlookers as Platonov that we now know more about the sacrifices made for those beliefs, and can decide for ourselves whether it was worth the cost.

Lawton Browning is a musician and writer. He lives in Portland Oregon with his wife, young son and unwieldy collection of art house VHS tapes.

## Eric King: Free at Last

Following nearly ten years of incarceration and numerous attempts by the State to frame, break and murder him, anarchist prisoner Eric King was released in late Dec. 2023.

Imprisoned for taking direct action in solidarity with the 2014 Ferguson, Mo. uprising, King survived Covid, attacks by neo-Nazi prisoners, and years of abuse from guards. His ten-year sentence was for an attempt to Molotov the Kansas City office of a Democratic Congress member following the murder of Michael Brown by a Ferguson cop.

Throughout King's prison sentence, he spent time teaching yoga, practicing mindfulness, writing poems and letters, doing legal work for himself and others, and taking classes. Despite keeping busy and trying to steer clear of trouble, he was repeatedly attacked and threatened by white supremacists and correctional officers because of his outspoken antifascist and anarchist political beliefs.

In a 2016 statement, King wrote: "I stand by my actions. After seeing what happened in Ferguson, so close down the road, I was disgusted by the lack of mobilization in my city. My act as a very personal display of my anger and rage toward the state as well as an act of solidarity to everyone in Ferguson."

Solidarity with Eric King can be expressed at [supportericking.org](http://supportericking.org)

Eric King leaving prison unbowed.







# Anarchism & Science Fiction

## Some Suggested Best Reads

**BEN BECK**

**M**ost anarchists are familiar with Ursula K. Le Guin's utopian science fiction novel, *The Dispossessed*. But its fame has somewhat served to overshadow other works of science fiction that are also of great interest. Here are a few of those.

>Eric Frank Russell's 1948 story, "And Then There Were None," was the nearest sci fi work to an anarchist utopia prior to Le Guin's 1974 novel, and was praised as such in the pages of *Freedom* and *Anarchy* at the time, starting with a full-length review in 1954, under the headline "An Anarchist Utopia," saying it "makes an anarchist society not only attractive, but also eminently practical." John Pilgrim, writing in 1963, speculated on "just how much influence this much anthologised tale has had in forming the political opinions of the fallout generation."

>In Robert Sheckley's 1954 short story, "Skulking Permit," a backwater planet is re-contacted by Imperial Earth. The inhabitants attempt to revive old Earth customs—crime, police, etc.—but fail by misunderstanding the point of it all. It's a splendid anarchic story. The colonists have lived without authority so long that there's manifestly no need for it. Most recently included in Hank Davis and Christopher Ruocchio's 2020 anthology *Overruled*.

>Robert Nichols's *Daily Lives in Nghsi-Altai* is a short tetralogy, published in 1977–79. Set in a near-future alter-

nate-world central Asian land, it's strong on ecological values, and the anarchist influence is explicitly acknowledged. Written in a fragmented, poetic, and impressionistic style, it was a significant influence on Le Guin, who said that "... Nghsi-Altai is in some respects the very place I was laboriously trying to get to, and yet lies in quite the opposite direction ..."

>Hans Widmer's *bolo'bolo*, published in 1983 as by p.m., is regarded by Ruth Kinna, British anarchist author of *The Government of No One*, as among the most influential modern anarchist utopias. For Kinna it resonates with Kropotkin's utopianism, though is clearly distinct from it, as imagining "fleeting possibilities rather than enduring alternatives."

>Peter Lamborn Wilson's *False Documents* is a diverse collection of pseudo-real fictions rather in the Borgesian magical realism vein. The best of these, and certainly the most relevant here, is "Visit Port Watson!," which is a spoof travel-guide to the utopian island of Sonsorol, playfully combining ideas from various libertarian strands. It was first published in 1985, in Rucker, Wilson & Wilson, eds: *Semiotext(e) SF*.

>Mike Gilliland's *The Free* (1st edition 1986; 5th edition 2021) is described by its publisher as "A novel of love, hope and revolution, set in the very near future, on an island off the coast of Britain. From the underground to revolution, repression, and resistance!" In his list of the novel's themes (at the end of the text) Gilliland says, "The Free are inspired



by the anarchist fiesta, trying out Pete Kropotkin's cut on Darwin. Cooperation in tooth and claw."

*The Free* gives an exceptionally vivid account of the exhilaration of the revolutionary process, with strongly imagined characters and very believable dialogue.

>Steve Cullen's *The Last Capitalist: A Dream of a New Utopia*, published in 1996 by London's anarchist Freedom Press, is an anarchist utopia set in a future Britain. The story involves a quest for the eponymous capitalist where England has been renamed "Atopia," and is explicitly anarchist, and the state and capitalism have crumbled world-wide.

Alternative politics exist, to reflect local conditions and aspirations. Among these is a republic on the Isle of Man, based on delegate democracy. In Atopia, everything is voluntary, education is through free schools, and the economy is based on barter. Informed by green principles, technology is nevertheless sufficiently sophisticated to include high-altitude remote-controlled airships, to maintain satellite communications. Social life is fueled by plenty of ale and an easy attitude to sex. The book is joyful and optimistic.

>Dennis Danvers's *The Watch: Being the Unauthorized Sequel to Peter A. Kropotkin's Memoirs of a Revolutionist—as Imparted to Dennis Danvers by Anchee Mahur, Traveler from a Distant Future; or, A Science Fiction Novel* (2002) is supposedly written in the first person by Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, who has been plucked from his deathbed, rejuvenated, into a future in which he has the opportunity to foster anarchism once more. The plot is on the weak side, but the writing is first rate, and the Kropotkin character thoroughly researched, as is historical anarchism with references to more recent figures such as Murray Bookchin and Noam Chomsky. A wonderful introduction to anarchist ideas for anyone not familiar with them.

>*The premise of Anarquía. An Alternate History of the Spanish Civil War*, by Brad Linaweaver and J. Kent Hastings (2004), is that, instead of being defeated by a combination of



"If bookshops create a 'radical, sex work positive, trans feminist, speculative fiction' genre section just for my work, I'm okay with that."

Kes Otter Liefte, author,  
"Margins and Murmurations"

Fascists and Stalinists, the Spanish anarchists prevail, thanks to an alternate Werner von Braun, who—with 1940s actor Hedy Lamarr—designs a rocket-based weapon which he puts in their hands.

The book is so well-researched, and the setting so comparatively unfamiliar, that it's easy to suspend disbelief in an uncertainty as to what relates to the actual history of the civil war and revolution and what to the alternate history the authors create. In the course of the narrative there is much discussion of the various flavours of anarchism active in Spain of the 1930s.

>In L. Timmel Duchamp's strongly feminist *The Marq'ssan Cycle—Alanya to Alanya* (2005), Earth women, including some anarchists, are actively supported by the Marq'ssan aliens, who, with technologi-

cal superiority on their side, vigorously promote "non-authoritarian self-governance." It examines relationships of power at many levels, especially the interpersonal.

>Duchamp's *Blood in the Fruit* (2007) includes a sequence in which the North West Free Zone celebrates Emma Goldman Day. Three Goldman quotations serve as epigraph to the novel, and the front cover features a photograph of her speaking in New York City's Union Square. The author said that "Most of the Free Zone activists are working-class women who embrace a philosophy of life and politics very close to Goldman's . . ."

>Kes Otter Liefte came to SF with an unusual and rather refreshing perspective. *Margins and Murmurations* (2017) is the first in a trilogy, each book of which is readable as a standalone novel, presenting a not-too-distant future dystopia in which the LGBTQ+ community, sex workers, and disabled people are centre stage in the Resistance.

Their *Conserve and Control* (2018) is set in the same future, but further ahead (a hundred years from the publication date), and, in the author's words, the second book "looks superficially like a liberal utopia—all permaculture gardens and trans-inclusive corporations—but is very much the most sinister world I could find the power to write in 2018." >>>>



*Dignity (2020)* is at a nearer stage in the same future, when the pandemic of the 2020s is still within living memory. Liefie says their intention was for *Dignity* to be “the most utopic writing I could find within myself.” In a 2021 interview, the extent to which their work can be described as anarchist is explicitly discussed; rather evading the word, she replied “If book shops create a ‘radical, sex work positive, trans feminist, speculative fiction’ genre section just for my work, I’m okay with that.” The discussion makes it clear that their intention is to present visions of a revolution to which people could relate.

>D.D. Johnston’s *Disnaeland (2022)* describes the first few months after the apocalypse in which mutual aid comes to the fore among survivors who realise in due course that the true dystopia was what went before. The book is joyfully warm and funny, the earthiness especially brought out by the Scots-inflected dialect employed throughout.

Johnston is himself an anarchist, with a strong background as an activist. The 2023 *Freedom* review, describing the novel as “perhaps the most hopeful apocalyptic novel you’re ever likely to read,” concludes that “It’s not necessary to be an anarchist to enjoy *Disnaeland*, but it’s certainly a novel that has a lot to offer anarchist readers.”

>M.E. O’Brien & Eman Abdelhadi: *Everything for Everyone. An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052–2072 (2022)*. This remarkable novel is structurally unique in SF in

being presented as an edited collection of oral history interviews with New Yorkers living in 2072, in which no single story predominates, but collectively the reader learns of the extraordinary societal changes that have taken place in the previous years (i.e., the fifty years since the date of publication).

The response to climate change and complete economic and political collapse has been global apart from an unreconstructed Australia, and radical in the extreme. It has taken place with extraordinary rapidity, and without any utopian consistency, so that in some instances the transition has been far from peaceful. But the world in 2072 is now essentially communist, in a vision which is essentially *an-archo*-communist, though the term isn’t used. The vision, as well as the history, is well realised, and largely credible. This may be a premature judgment on my part, but this is perhaps, for anarchists, the most significant work of SF written since *The Dispossessed*.

There are so many more that could be mentioned. Go to the [anarchySF.com](http://anarchySF.com) website, which has the most comprehensive coverage anywhere of this subject.

Ben Beck lives in London where he worked supporting community housing management projects. He is still active in his own co-operative. He has followed the association between anarchism and science fiction for many years. [anarchySF.com](http://anarchySF.com) for anarchist sci fi; books, movies, other media.

## John Sinclair, poet, author, activist, Fifth Estate writer dies at 82

PETER WERBE

**J**ohn Sinclair, poet, author of *Guitar Army*, manager of the MC5 rock band, anti-racist White Panther Party co-founder, and early Fifth Estate writer, died of heart failure at 82 in Detroit on April 9. Sinclair was remembered in publications across the U.S. and the world far from his Motor City base as a counterculture icon, a marijuana legalization campaigner, and a rock and roll enthusiast who was immortalized in a John Lennon song.

However, only slight mentions were made of Sinclair as a political activist whose radical perspective formed the matrix through which all of his other work flowed. In a 2005 interview in the *Detroit News*, a mainstream daily, he replied to a question about the MC5, the hard-rocking, Detroit-based band he managed, “What was our world outlook? Everything must be free for everybody — that’s a good place to start. Total assault on the culture, by any means necessary. . .”

Both he and his wife, Leni, were involved with the Fifth Estate from almost



its first issue in 1965. John wrote a column, *The Coatpuller*, for the then bi-weekly tabloid, heralding the emerging alternative culture of literature, free jazz, and poetry. Leni’s photos documented much of the Detroit cultural and political scene, several of which adorned the covers of the paper including those of the nascent Vietnam anti-war movement.

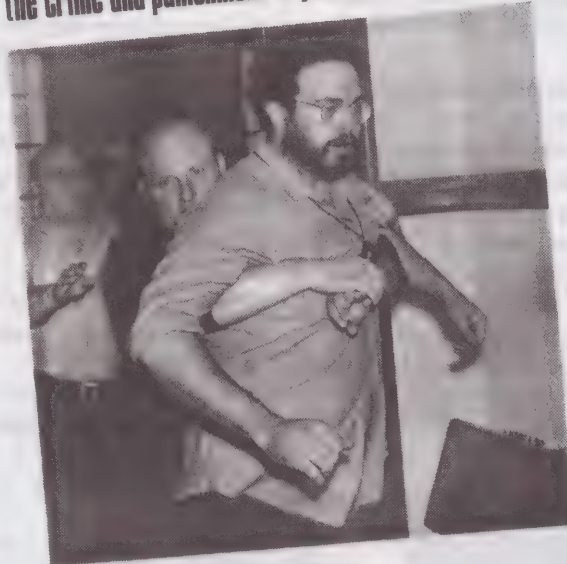


A NEWSPAPER OF DETROIT  
August 7, 1969  
Vol. 4 No. 7 (1969)

20¢  
25¢ DETROIT  
25¢ Everywhere

THE  
FIFTH  
ESTATE

the crime and punishment of john sinclair see page two



John Sinclair being restrained by court baliff after being sentenced to ten years in prison for marijuana.

Although always espousing a radical outlook, John was most known for his campaign to legalize marijuana for which he suffered three convictions for possession, including one in 1969 of 9 ½-10 years imprisonment by a vindictive Detroit judge for giving two joints to an undercover cop.

He famously was released following a Free John Sinclair Rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan in late 1971 headlined by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, also featuring Stevie Wonder, Bob Seger, Phil Ochs, jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, and others. Speakers included Jane Fonda, Allen Ginsberg, Black Panther Chairman Bobby Seale, Ed Sanders from the Fugs, and others. Lennon sang the song "John Sinclair" he composed for the event.

John, Leni, and several others, founded the anti-racist White Panther Party (WPP) in 1968. The MC5 was part of the milieu and often posed for promotion photos hoisting rifles. Sinclair said the point of the music was "to drive you out of your mind and into your body."

The late Pun Plamondon, a WPP co-founder, addressed the fact that much of the Detroit left during the 1960s dismissed the Party and the band as apolitical hippies who were only interested in getting high and listening to rock and roll. At a 2017 retrospective on the White Panthers that I hosted at Detroit's African American museum also featuring John and Leni, Pun said, "To the left, we were counterculture clowns, but we went out every weekend and gave out revolutionary literature including the Fifth Estate to hundreds and hundreds of young people while the left was arguing about Mao."

In 1969, Sinclair, Plamondon, and Jack Forest, another White Panther member were indicted by a federal grand jury for the dynamite bombing of a secret CIA office in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where the group had moved following the 1967 Detroit Rebellion. Sinclair was already in prison on the marijuana conviction and Plamondon fled the country for Algeria where he shared residence with another fugitive, Black Panther Party leader, Eldridge Cleaver.

When the Sinclair defense team demanded government wiretap logs from numerous phones including that of the Fifth Estate, the government dropped the charges against the three. The decision of a federal judge ordering the government to disclose the White Panther illegal wiretaps was

upheld unanimously by the U.S. Supreme Court. That led the Nixon White House to send operatives to remove the illegal phone taps it had placed in the offices of the Democratic Party at the Watergate complex, eventually leading to Nixon's resignation.

At a memorial for Plamondon in 2023 in Ann Arbor, Sinclair in honoring his friend said, "I'm no rat and never would be, but now that Pun is gone, I can say it. Pun bombed the CIA office." The crowd cheered wildly.

Sinclair was a legend in the rock and roll world. He was instrumental in shaping and promoting Detroit's Grande Ballroom from 1966-1972 that first featured local bands from the city's rich music scene, and later saw the greatest

classic bands of the era on stage including The Who, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Cream, Grateful Dead, as well as blues artists such as Howlin' Wolf, BB King, and John Lee Hooker. He was instrumental in bringing saxophonist John Coltrane and the Sun Ra Arkestra to the venue.

John became the manager of the MC5 as the group gained international fame for playing "high-energy rock and roll" that reflected the spirit of the era and the subculture that defined it. Many later rockers and music critics defined the band as proto-punk typified by their wild on-stage performance and high-decibel sound. Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello said the MC5 "basically invented punk rock," a description denied by Sinclair. He told the *Detroit News* in the 2005 interview, the MC5 described their music as "avant rock," and ascribed the origin of punk to another Detroit area band, Iggy and the Stooges.

The 5's oft-covered signature song began with, "Kick Out the Jams, Motherfuckers," a call that drove their young audiences into a frenzy of cheering and dancing, but didn't sit well with the authorities. The band often had the plug pulled on their amps to unceremoniously end a show, kicked out of venues, and beaten and arrested by the cops. They were the house band for the Grande Ballroom where they recorded their first album live, and were the only band willing to stay and play in Chicago during the violent 1968 Democratic Party convention that became a police riot of assaults on protesters.

John's poetry was recognized internationally. He wrote thousands of poems beginning in the early 1960s. Along with his Detroit Artists' Workshop compatriots, they published his work and that of other poets in a seemingly end-



less stream of mimeographed books and broadsheets. The self-published volumes that sold for a dollar 60 years ago, now bring prices in the hundreds. John loved to read his poems particularly with music accompaniment and released dozens of CDs backed up by either a single guitar or his Blues Scholars musical aggregation.

His last public appearance, just several weeks before his death, was in Paris at the Bourse de Commerce to close out an exhibit of the artwork of Detroit Mike Kelley. So respected was John that the performance space paid for his airfare from Detroit to Paris so he could read just a few of his poems. One couldn't ask for a better final gig.

After the first issue of the Fifth Estate appeared in late 1965, John and Leni joined the staff of one, Harvey Ovshinsky, the paper's founder. Upon seeing the upstart publication, they quickly realized the potential for publicizing the emerging hip culture in music, art, and poetry in an era when there was no internet or proliferation of alternative

publications. Ovshinsky credits the Sinclairs with saving the paper from publishing only one issue. Leni's photographs and writing, and John's articles and columns brought information about the counterculture of the 1960s to a readership and community eager to be turned on.

In his bestselling 1969 manifesto for revolution, *Guitar Army*, Sinclair wrote, "Our culture is a revolutionary culture, a revolutionary force on the planet, the seed of the new order that will come to flower with the disintegration and collapse of the obsolete social and economic forms which presently infest the earth."

Let's make it so.

John Sinclair's Fifth Estate writing can be found in our online archives at [fiftheestate.org/archive/search](http://fiftheestate.org/archive/search).

Peter Werbe is a staff member of the Fifth Estate and lives in the Detroit area. [peterwerbe.com](http://peterwerbe.com).



2016 Montreal Anarchist Theatre Festival,  
*Ni Femme, Ni Clowne*  
(Neither Woman Nor Clown)

commodified, re-packaged, and sold back to others as pop culture to be consumed. People accept that they must subscribe to watch movies or hear music to get their cultural fix. For the average person, the high costs of attending live theatre or dance performances are usually prohibitive.

Who would ever think that ordinary people, with little experience, can tap into and harness their own creativity and imaginations and use their own powers of expression with others to create non-commercial art with a political purpose? A piece of work that can also be used as an organizing tool? And, do this in a collective, supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere with others who share the same ache for radical social change? When people are given the opportunity and the goal to dance, draw, paint, sing, shout, act and strategize their way into the minds and hearts of an unexpected public, it can happen. And, be enjoyable.

Using my decades of experience as a multi-disciplinary anarchist artist, I teach Creative Resistance (CR): how to use the arts, music, dance, theatre, poetry, visual art, digital art, etc., to

## Have fun; be creative *Change the World*

NORMAN NAWROCKI

**I**magine if more people believed in the power and the magic of collective creativity, what a crazy wonderful new anarchist world we could build. Under capitalism, any form of creativity is usually seen as an individual pursuit, the domain of the rich, the elite and *artistes*. It's something to be



address critical issues and work towards creating a saner world. And, how to use this approach for more effective community organizing and radical social change. The setting can be universities and colleges, but also in the community with housing rights or climate crisis activists, labor organizers, LGBTQ2S groups, and anarchists. The participants are mostly people with no arts practice background, no performing experience, who never imagined how the arts could be useful in their work.

At one dedicated CR housing rights workshop hosted by a group of anarchists and sympathizers in Kelowna recently a small town in British Columbia where tourism is a major economic activity, participants were asked to name and summarize the local problems and possible solutions in short answers. The list blossomed into material for slogans, posters and sketches. Their examples:



Zombie Pipeline street theatre walk in Vancouver BC in 2023 to protest Enbridge's Westcoast Connector Gas Transmission project.

"Lack of tenant rights: need to advocate!" "Real estate as a capital investment: Housing as a Human Right!" "Empty vacation homes: Fill them with squatters!" "Short term rentals to tourists: Ban Air B'n'Bs!" "Stigma harms unhoused and housing insecure people: Education!"

Each work group then chose one theme, brainstormed a creative physical, theatrical depiction of it, and dramatized both problem and solution. The result: punchy, easy to understand, improvised anarchist guerrilla theatre sketches that could be performed anywhere in public. They also added improvised live musical accompaniment, sung chants, and drew simple, but powerful artwork to hold up behind and alongside the performers. During a two hour workshop, they accomplished all this in less than thirty minutes with a ten minute rehearsal. The rest of the time was dedicated to learning the principles and theory of CR and best practices elsewhere.

Their next step was to return to their community groups

to share the new skills, including working with the local unhoused population, some of who had expressed interest in using theatre to advance their demands for affordable housing.

In St. John's, Newfoundland a few years ago, a group of students wanted to mount a campaign to address the problem of date rape drugs in bars. As a result of a CR workshop, they devised a series of improv sketches about actual bar experiences which they would later refine, film, and, with the cooperation of local taverns, screen on the bar's TVs as public service announcements. One workshop participant wrote, "I came away full of ideas, firing on all cylinders! So much of what you had to say was very practical and extremely helpful. Some of your words replay in my brain every day: e.g. "you can't do this kind of creative work alone, sitting in front of a computer screen."

In Regina, Saskatchewan, young trade unionists, a few years ago, planned a public support campaign for baristas trying to organize outlets of a local coffee shop chain. The CR crew brainstormed and enacted not only short, agit-prop theatre sketches to be performed on the street outside and inside the shops, but also, printed coffee cup holders with printed messages on them to support the workers. They even re-wrote the lyrics to hit pop songs to encourage the public to pressure management to recognize the union and the rights of their employees to better working conditions. According to one of the activists, "Your workshop made me realize that although our passion for social justice is a serious struggle that we fight for every day, our vision seems more attainable when we focus on building a culture of resistance through creativity, collective action and fun!"

Earlier this year, I worked online with members of a wanting to remain anonymous environmental group fighting the Royal Bank of Canada financing oil pipelines. The participants devised a whole strategy of CR actions again using hit and run improv theatre to be performed in bank lobbies, during bank shareholder's meetings, and on the street outside these meetings. The actions included everything from spilling black paint to represent oil on bank property to dressing up as shareholders, crashing meetings, and taking over the microphones demanding accountability, or dressing up as ATMs inviting the public to put money in, then someone spills oil/black paint. A participant wrote afterwards "Your workshop got us all fired up raring to plan a new campaign based on Creative Resistance actions."

As a card-carrying, black flag waving anarchist, all participants in my CR workshops are encouraged to follow anarchist principles—no leaders, no stars. Everyone has an equal role to play. Consensus is key. Contesting authority, dominant narratives and beliefs on the agenda. We work collectively, adopt affinity group approaches and hone how to practice self-reliance and group self-management. We never forget the importance of play, of having the freedom



to explore one's own playful nature, to let loose and experience the joy of self-expression. Because struggle does not always have to be boring.

After a high-energy CR workshop or class, participants feel empowered. Aware that they now have access to a new organizing and activist tool. One to help think, imagine, strategize and mount more effective visible campaigns and actions.

They discover maybe never acknowledged creative skills that reveal the hidden clown, singer, or actor in themselves and hear the power of their own voices in a dynamic and different kind of group formation singing acting or chanting together. They experience the thrill of collectively creating something possibly wild and artistic to address social issues and imagine potential solutions.

And, realize that they accomplished this within a dedicated short time frame. It's a new alternative to the usually staid activism that neglects creative practices. Another approach to help re-boot imaginations and inspire, inform and empower oneself and others also. A means to engage people in new fun ways. Provoke questions. Reach a broader public that tunes out traditional protests. Communicate ideas more effectively. And attract more media attention. Participants always affirm that they leave the workshops energized ready

to hit the streets.

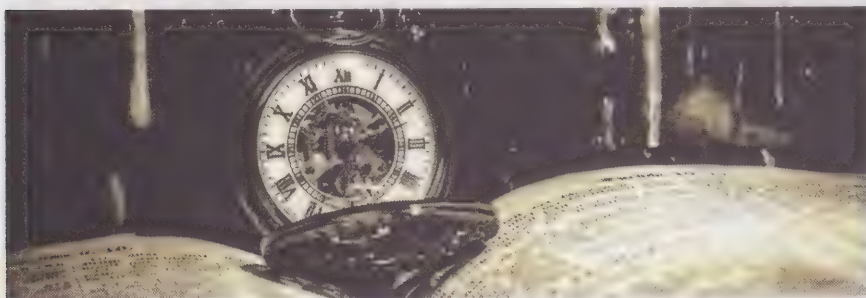
This freedom to create and express oneself within a political framework is something anarchists have long identified with. From critiques of the State and the bourgeois social order to visions of a new world, anarchist artists and sympathizers have always used puppetry, poetry, song and theatre to spread the Idea.

Lively anarchist cabarets thrived across Europe in the late 19th century. Dozens of anarchist theatre groups existed worldwide in the early 20th century. Carnival-like anarchist protests from the 1970s onward always had an artistic component. The annual Montreal International Anarchist Theatre Festival where the public can view the best of contemporary anarchist theatre continues the tradition as do the cabarets of the Anarchist Writers Bloc, also in Montreal.

Anarchist artists are especially aware of the links between creative self-expression, the power of the arts to stir people's minds and working towards Social Revolution.

All power to the imagination.

Norman Nawrocki is a Montreal-based comedian, sex educator, cabaret artist, musician, author, actor, producer and composer. His newest book is *Red Squared Montreal* (Black Rose Books, 2023). [normannawrocki.com](http://normannawrocki.com)



## Predicting societies sliding into chaos **The Future Is...Written?**

**End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration**

Peter Turchin

Penguin Press, 2023

**ERIC LAURSEN**

*Historian Arnold J. Toynbee once insisted that history is not "just one damn thing after another."*

*Joe Strummer, lead singer of The Clash, once insisted that, "The future is unwritten."*

**S**omehow, it has always seemed to me that both statements are true. That's why I'm neverendingly fascinated by theories that profess to find predictable patterns or cycles in human history, from the medieval Arab

scholar Ibn Khaldun to Marx to Oswald Spengler's 1918 *Decline of the West* to Toynbee's own 12-volume *A Study of History*. None of their theories are right (whatever that means), or even broadly valid, but at their best they yield some useful insights about the road humanity is on and what we need to look out for going forward.

And as a genre, they have something to tell us about our modern era, when capitalism and the state are ever so anxious to convince us that they are the culmination and fulfillment of some rational course of human development and ever so eager to get ahead of some real or perceived historical trajectory that might swamp them: the "unknown unknowns," as Bush's Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put it.

Peter Turchin, theoretical biologist-turned-social scientist, has been assembling the latest of these conceptual edifices for the last couple of decades. *End Times*, his forebodingly titled new book, is an attempt to distill his method and findings for a non-specialist audience. He is a project leader



of something called the Complexity Science Hub in Vienna and the director of CrisisDB, which is described as “a massive historical database of societies sliding into chaos—and then emerging from it.” He calls himself a “collapsologist” (which inevitably put me in mind of the hot-shot scientist in *Jurassic Park* who refers to himself as a “chaotician”).

Turchin himself has been attracting attention since the tumultuous 2020 election and the MAGA insurgency at the Capitol the following January, because 10 years earlier, he had predicted that the US was “due for another sharp instability spike by the early 2020s.” “Sadly,” he notes in his new book, “nothing about my model has been disproved in the intervening years.”

He calls the discipline he claims to have invented “cliodynamics,” defining it as the interdisciplinary study of long-term historical processes, using “diverse mathematical models” and differential equations to do the analysis. For our data-obsessed age, cliodynamics is a perfect fit. Since 2003, it’s even had its own scholarly journal, which Turchin helped found.

I’m aware that I’m being a bit snide about Turchin’s work, which is serious and not badly intentioned. So, here’s what he does that is useful and worth thinking about. To tease out a cycle in historical events and trends, he looks for proxies that can stand for larger trends in wealth distribution, health, and other indicators. He looks at statistics on average height, infant mortality, and lifespan, for example, as proxies for health, and numbers on relative wages—the differential between, say, compensation for Jeff Bezos and an Amazon warehouse worker—as a proxy for the wealth gap.

These numbers, and many others, are meant to help us gauge how stable or unstable a society might be: how close it is to a crisis, such as a collapse of the ruling class, a set of economic arrangements, or even an entire state. “The goal of cliodynamics,” Turchin tells us, “is to integrate all important forces of history, whether they are demographic, economic, social, cultural or ideological.”

His team has identified 300 cases of crisis, from the Neolithic era to the present, for which they have “good data” on about 100 so far. These range from the American Civil War to the decline and fall of imperial China in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the fall of the Roman Empire to the decline of Mamluk Egypt in the late Middle Ages. Some-



**Cultures undergo a period of disorder, then reconstitute themselves; other times, they fall apart entirely.**

times—in one in five cases—crises are averted. Other times, cultures undergo a period of disorder, then reconstitute themselves; other times, they fall apart entirely.

Just like Ibn Khaldun and Spengler before him, Turchin describes a pattern of birth, growth, maturity (“Golden Age”), and “times of troubles” for the societies he stud-

ies, and in every case, three factors contribute to the latter. First and foremost is “overproduction of elites,” meaning there are too many educated, qualified people vying for too few positions in the national elite, leading to factionalism and eventually elite breakdown. Second is “popular immiseration,” which occurs when a predatory class puts a system in place that transfers wealth into its hands from the rest of the population: something Turchin calls the “wealth pump.”

The third ingredient—really a product of the other two—is “failing fiscal health and weakened legitimacy of the state.” The state can’t pay for its vital activities, including maintaining infrastructure and providing welfare and other services that help maintain living standards, and the population loses faith in its promises. Putting together the data on all three of these factors, Turchin creates a “political stress index” that tells us when any of them has gone out of kilter.

The current period in the US certainly displays all three ingredients of a society in crisis, down to the split in the national ruling class between the more traditional elements and a Trumpist counter-elite, and some of the data Turchin uses to back this up are startling. We know that wages in America have been mostly stagnating for decades, for instance, but he gives us some perspective on how bad the situation really is, finding that since the 1960s, relative wages have declined in a more sustained manner than in any period since the three decades from 1830 to 1860.

Ultimately, however, the core audience for cyclical models like Turchin’s is not us but the elite, a fact that has not escaped him. “They get it,” he said in a 2019 interview about Silicon Valley billionaires who seek him out, “but then they have two questions: How can they make money out of the situation? And when should they buy their plot in New Zealand?”

This suggests the deeper problem with his model, and with the analysis he poses in *End Times*. Human liberation and a thriving natural world are of no concern to him here. The objective is to show how societies become disrupted and



fall into cycles of violence. Abolishing the wealth pump and ending immiseration are fine and even necessary things to pursue, but because they strengthen social bonds and restore stability and faith in the elite, not because they are good in and of themselves. Despotism or democracy, it doesn't matter: stability is the objective.

One of Turchin's primary suggestions for getting rid of the wealth pump is questionable as well. "Massive immigration" needs to be squeezed off, he writes, sounding a lot like Donald Trump, because it drives down wages and thus "disadvantages workers." But what about the effect this would have on the global distribution of wealth and the relative immiseration of workers elsewhere? Wouldn't it create further instability in other parts of the global economy, with blowback sure to follow?

Although he seldom uses the word, the stability Turchin seems most deeply concerned with is that of the state, be it the American plutocracy, the Chinese or Russian despotisms, or the Nordic social democracies. And, for him, states can't do without governing elites.

"All large-scale, complex societies have ruling classes," Turchin writes, and complex human societies need elites—"rulers, administrators, thought leaders—to function well. We don't want to get rid of them; the trick is to con-

strain them to act for the benefit of all." That's why he tags overproduction of elites, and instability in their ranks, as the key destabilizing factor. A disaffected populace, manifested in popular insurgencies, organized labor, and self-organized communities, are symptoms of the problem, not the foundation of a new, more equitable society.

Today, thanks in part to many new findings on neolithic culture and the evidence accumulated from the many attempts to establish societies outside the state in modern times, we know that Turchin is wrong; large-scale, complex societies do not need to be organized under an elite. We also know, from some of the evidence Turchin himself discusses, that constraining some portion of the elite to address a crisis and work in the public interest is the rarest of things. "The iron law of oligarchy," as he calls it, "states that when an interest group acquires a lot of power, it inevitably starts using this power in a self-interested way."

The purpose of the study of cliodynamics, Turchin says, is to show us how to eliminate or minimize humanity's periods of violence and instability. But the evidence suggests that the best way to do so is to get rid of the state and capitalism, not attempt to tame them.

Eric Laursen writes frequently for the Fifth Estate



## Two New David Rovics Albums

Internet trolls dog his every step, but he keeps on singing for peace and liberation

**Notes from a Holocaust**  
20 Songs, 2024  
David Rovics

**BARRY STRINGER**

Growing up on punk rock music as part of my introduction to anarchism, I always understood punk to be a variant of folk music.

Having missed the most prolific heyday of the people's folk music of the 1960s,

singers like Pete Seeger and Phil Ochs and their lesser-known contemporaries performed melodic, catchy, and often more accessible versions of what the underground papers (like this one) were doing with their radical articles. Passionate storytelling and principled advocacy are what make music a meaningful force for community and change.

Today, not just folk, but all genres make protest music, if they would. Hip-hop and pop provide social commentary, and rock, punk, and folk all remain relevant, when they choose to do so. Broadcasting the news in real time on Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok, Twitch, among other channels, has made the DIY-ethos

of radical news accessible to anyone with a cell phone, and musicians have joined the fray. But as hyped as all these converging and diverging spaces might be, many activists, whether revolutionary content-curators or defiant doom-scrollers, all complain of constant oversaturation and abbreviated attention spans flattening the flavor of our communal digital soup.

Prolific radical folk-singer, author, blogger, podcaster, and more, David Rovics, has released approximately 40 albums in 25 years and has boldly tested almost every possible digital medium to get his messages out. Combining his unrelenting values while offering listeners near-universal access, Rovics has found himself in the crosshairs of an organized social media backlash and attempted cancellations.

His outspoken Palestinian solidar-



ity reflected in his songs has caused the backlash, but there never seems to be a genuine logic as to why one artist gets attacked, while others get a pass. In the last several years, Rovics has been targeted with an organized, relentless campaign of denunciation, calumny, and harassment from a small crew of self-righteous anarchists. They base these charges on his choice of interview subjects on livestream podcasts conducted during the pandemic. Rovics hosted the "Fifth Estate Live," a podcast project of this publication. It should be clear to Fifth Estate readers that this magazine would not allow a bigot to broadcast under its name or publish articles he has written for it.

Most recently, Rovics' public Facebook page has attracted countless pro-Israel accounts posting 26,000 comments on his page mostly in the form of slurs and accusations. Undeterred by trolls from the far right and cancellation campaigns from the far left, Rovics continues to advocate for inclusive, loving, and militant mass movements to counter war and authoritarianism across the planet.

When people attack Rovics online or contact the venues on his concert tours urging them to cancel a gig, these tactics directly harm his ability to support himself from the nominal donations that his fans provide by attending a show, streaming a specific song on a major platform for minuscule kickback, or joining his Patreon community where a devoted core help sustain his career. These attempted "accountability" campaigns by professed anti-authoritarians often bring out the worst suspicions, hyper-vigilant security culture, and ineffective cop-like tactics.

In the first five months of 2024, Rovics released two full-length digital albums of so much new content (more than 40 songs) that in a previous generation could have been considered double-albums, each of them. While pop stars of late have been both celebrated and criticized for releasing so much content, Rovics is at his most prolific in response to the crises that destroy the planet and its people on multiple fronts, whether military, economic, political, religious, or ecological.

The first of these two recent albums is *Notes from a Holocaust*, released in January of this year. The 20-song set daringly documents the first three months of Israel's attacks on Gaza following the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023. Each song is harrowing and heartbreaking, infuriating and inspiring, insofar as the record cannot linger in the headphones, but catalyzes moral outrage and direct action.

Without irony or piety, Rovics notes how the worldwide cultural and religious holidays with origins in the region of the atrocities went on as scheduled, even as those would dare, had to confront "Baby Jesus In The Rubble." From "The Apocalypse Will Be Televised" to "They're Killing Off the Journalists of Gaza," he reports with song the shocking disregard for decency and previous protocols of so-called combat of which this massacre makes a mockery.

Stinging tracks such as "Antisemite" or "Just Like the Nazis Did" convey the honest messages that have been circulated in the anti-authoritarian milieu since the incisive Fredy Perlman tract "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom," still available from Black and Red Books. Perlman's conclusion cuts to the fact: "It galls me that a new Fascism should choose to use the experience of the victims of the earlier Fascism among its justifications."

*Notes from a Holocaust* is the kind of album that serves as the people's news and a poetic and prophetic moral response to unspeakable brutality and unconscionable horrors. The tracks convey stunning songcraft and brilliant blistering lyrics, unpacking the human horrors of state terror in shocking and sad specifics.

David Rovics' major music releases and frequent podcasts are available on most major music streaming platforms. You can also find much more content, links, and ways to support him at davidrovics.com.

Barry Stringer is an activist and music fan. A long-time reader, this is his first article for Fifth Estate. He lives in Las Vegas.



David Rovics performing in Detroit

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## Peoples' Histories of Anti-Racism **Smash the Fascists From Below!**

**It Did Happen Here: An Antifascist People's History**

Editors: Moe Bowstern, Mic Crenshaw, Alec Dunn, Celina Flores, Julie Perini, and Erin Yanke  
PM Press, 2023

**We Go Where They Go: The Story of Anti-Racist Action**

Shannon Clay, Kristin Schwartz and Michael Staudenmaier  
PM Press, 2023

**LIAM KLIMENT**

**W**hen the *It Did Happen Here* podcast started gracing our airwaves, or rather our streaming services, in Spring 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic was still requiring stay-at-home practice and the fires of the George Floyd uprising were still smoldering.

It was a strange period, where most of the U.S. economy had frozen and masses of people took their streets and neighborhoods back from police control, albeit temporarily. It was perfect timing for retrospection and questioning through the medium of history from the bottom up.

In 2014, historian and activist Staughton Lynd proposed three perspectives regarding history from below that radical thinkers would be wise to implement in the struggle against the hegemonic production of knowledge and class ideology.

One, that history from below should challenge mainstream versions of the past. Two, that the United States was founded on crimes against humanity. And three, that those who make history should be regarded not only as sources of facts, but experts in interpreting what happened.

*It Did Happen Here* and *We Go Where They Go* implement this perspective of anti-racist, anti-fascist activity in their as history from below expertly told through extensive interviews and consulting of personal archives of former members of Anti-Racist Action (ARA), Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, Coalition For Human Dignity, the Minneapolis Baldies, plus several other anti-racist organizations active throughout the U.S. and Canada in the 1980s and 1990s.

Anti-Racist Action was founded in the late 1980's as a formalized confederation, although a decentralized network in practice, of several anti-racist skinhead crews that had been active across the country. The initial ARA network was made up of chapters in Minneapolis, Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles, and Toronto. While not explicitly an anarchist organization, many ARA members identified

as anarchists, and their organizational methods anchored in decentralized action linked by clear points of unity offer a toolbox for anarchists today.

While remaining books about the past, these contributions to the recent history of anti-racist struggle remind us that the present is not at all exceptional. Since the 1980s, mainstream media in the United States have sensationalized grassroots anti-racist organizing as a matter of two sides being equally violent and both deserving of criminal persecution.

Rather than wilt in light of the realization that the violence of the contemporary signifies the continuum of the past, anti-fascist and anti-racist organizers can and should relish the plentitude of lessons available to us in these toolboxes-as-books. Several of the interviewees in both books remark how modern day antifa is a continuation of the coalitions and street crews fighting neo-Nazis in the 1980s and 1990s. One stark difference is the contemporary's magnified capacity and media outreach. One clear parallel that continues is the mainstream sensationalizing of street violence.

This valued perspective from an experienced gaze reminds me of a workshop a workshop I attended in Seattle about grand juries in 2012, when anarchists were the target of a federal investigation into property damage at a May Day rally. Former George Jackson Brigade member Mark Cooke remarked, "I've got respect for you anarchists out there. We never could have gotten away with the crazy shit you've pulled off, and now the federal government is after you for it. I respect all y'all for that." Somewhat comforting, somewhat terrifying.

The days of rival skinhead crews battling on opposing sides of the political spectrum may feel long ago in a land far away, but the parallel similarities abound in these two books. Both contain stories about groups of friends who decided to stand up to the bullies in town and were empowered by language and political ideologies that described what they knew so well: anti-authoritarian direct action.

China, a black skinhead member



of Portland ARA, states the ethos of anti-racist successful, militant anti-racist organizing clearly; "It wasn't some highly organized process. It was a group of us that already knew each other and that were already together." Those who have been on the streets recently fighting the presence of fascists, Western chauvinists, and other far-right manifestations understand that a deep affinity for one another is what brings us together in the face of brutal violence. Anti-racists in the streets are not the highly organized cadre, funded by a leftist philanthropist that the media makes us out to be.

The Coalition for Human Dignity (CHD) was formed in Portland in the early 1990s to conduct research on hate groups throughout the Pacific Northwest. It operated on the simple principle that whoever dominated the cultural landscape, dominated a very important tool in defining ideology.

CHD prefigured much of the work of contemporary antifa groups in the United States with the understanding that the only thing that would work in pushing out white nationalism was a diversity of tactics. They took up the much-needed task of showing support for those facing off against Nazis throughout Portland's cultural spaces, as well as providing meeting venues, printing resources, and much needed research to formalized groups of anti-racists.

ARA also knew that the cultural terrain constituted a political arena, and they operated as such, flyering punk shows and regularly posting ads in alternative magazines like *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*. ARA tabled at shows for bands like The Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Rage Against the Machine, an accomplishment that feels fabled given the reluctance of

major contemporary artists to align themselves politically.

The striking aspect of this simple act is that it was either at the request of the bands, or through ARA members reaching out to them personally, signifying a mutual relationship of shared politics between militant anti-fascists and cultural producers like musicians. Providing radical anarchist and anti-fascist literature at music venues imbues the cultural space with political initiatives while also creating a chance for attendees to act on their convictions through getting in touch with a local ARA network.

While *We Go Where They Go* charts a history of Anti-Racist Action, and how a confederated group of anti-racists across North America organized to fight racists like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, *It Did Happen Here* serves as a magnifying glass into one city's role in this wave of grassroots anti-fascist organizing. The two play off each other remarkably well, both employing extensive use of interviews with participants and allowing interviewees space to interpret the events as the popular historians they are.

As radical history books, they serve as invaluable gifts to our many futures, blueprints for how to craft our own narratives and histories to come.

Liam Kliment is an aspiring practitioner of history from below who lives in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, focusing on the intersections of subculture and radical action. He is currently researching and writing about the collusion of soccer and politics throughout the Americas.

## Out of View of the Panopticon Escaping Systems of Control

Anti Oculus: A Philosophy of Escape  
Acid Horizon  
Repeater

JESS FLARITY

**T**he New York City-based podcasting collective Acid Horizon's book features anarchist-leaning text ranging from informative musings on our present cyberpunk era to densely twisted lexical corridors lined with the thoughts of those like Jung, Deleuze, and Agamben.

The book is structurally messy: it is contained mostly under the field of philosophy, but it reminds me of a house where the contractors were swapped out during the construction process, resulting in a mishmash of several different styles. Some would argue that there is value in this kinetic



type of organization, though it does make me wonder what the difference is between escaping and simply being lost.

It is most cohesive in its opening, which imagines the population of our cybernetic, First World as something like a fluid that occasionally boils over. The authors argue that the methods of protest people currently use are under a form of *thermostatic control*, hence, why police refer to calming down protesters as kettling.

To combat the methods of control from authoritarian



forces such as the State, the book's main argument surrounds the idea of ocularity, or being able to identify all the ways that one might be observed. This form of self-consciousness eventually becomes its own identity that allows for a kind of conspiratorial thinking which can be organized outside of the focus of the panopticon of the Government and Big Tech. This movement is referred to as the Institute for the Recognition of Insurgent Subjectivities (I.R.I.S.).

In the second section, the book takes a sharp turn backwards in time, resulting in interesting ideas related to gender, disability theory, and racial identities as forms of resistance. Specifically, they cite the policing of gender related to intersex rights, make connections to the Nazi classification system for concentration camp inmates, summarize the troubled history of Haiti, and Foucault's ideas concerning deviance.

Disability theory here has a connection with gender theory in terms of Judith Butler's notion that both are a form of performance, and they refer to the ocularity of both these aspects as notions that want to be normalized or fixed as a method of state control.

While disability theory has been growing as a field since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, there is still much work to do in terms of social organization and equity for people designated as disabled by the society. It was refreshing to see *Anti-Oculus* doing consciousness raising during these segments, as there is a longer section on a national disability advocacy group called ADAPT which successfully disrupted bus service in Denver in 1978 to protest a new fleet of buses not containing wheelchair lifts. This was a much-welcomed new learning on my part, and the inclusion helps demonstrate how disability theory intersects in meaningful ways with anti-capitalist principles.

The book's midpoint has the apt subheading, "Going Astray," where there is yet another tangent, and they argue that pastoral power, going back to pre-agrarian times, is the ultimate source of social control. There are more long meanderings on Michel Foucault's work here, specifically *Discipline and Punish* (1975), that muse over ideas related to what is considered normal vs abnormal, and how technology has asserted itself as a form of bio-control. This does make sense when you think of people conforming on social media sites, which often reward groupthink behaviors. There are lots of references to sheep in this segment, but despite the overworn metaphor, their arguments about the power of transgression are rewarding for those who like crawling down a philosophical rabbit hole.

The book's final chapter is the most daunting, catering towards deeply seasoned readers of ontological philosophy, as evidenced by its paradoxical title, "The Imageless Image." This is the fun house mirror room in the building that spires off from its tallest tower, inverting back on itself, as the writers attempt to tie all their discordant ideas to our technocratic present.

I interpret the manifesto ultimately boiling down to this statement: abnormality is good/ideal. Most anarchists would agree with this. The book references Deleuze and Guattari's

notion of becoming-sorcerer as a way of finding truth in the sacred conspiracy as part of coming to this realization.

Deleuze and Guattari are most often associated with assemblage theory, which is a philosophical approach that states that everything in a society—people, systems, ideas—are all overlapping and constantly self-organizing. While neither philosopher ever identified as an anarchist, their work continues to inspire anarchist thinkers due to its flexibility and liberating qualities.

While some of the pseudo-mysticism of this section might inspire an occasional eye roll, in its final sentences the book asserts that the philosophers cannot put forth ideas that must be acted on by the people—the philosophers *are* the people.

As they state, "Philosophy cannot stand detached from the world, and any claim that it could is a false pretense that only functions to detach it from its own collaboration with the world as it currently is." This type of bold assertion is refreshing in our era of cheap talk, and the statement invites the reader to return to the book's more convoluted passages for a vigorous re-read.

After listening to a few episodes of the Acid Horizon podcast, I found the ideas put forth by this collective to be much more palatable for the ear when compared to my reader's eye (ironically). Perhaps this is because the production values on the podcast are excellent—Craig, Will, Adam, and all the others—have voices like late-night jazz DJs, and their voices sound like liquid gold.

As with other podcasts, I find myself zoning out after about eight minutes. Still, the occasional line or highlight pops out through the melodic wall of noise, such as, "highways are simultaneously modes of transport and systems of control." These moments resonate with the main anti-capitalist messages in *Anti-Oculus*.

So, who is this book for? Psychology or political science graduate students and garage philosophers are the most likely audiences who will resonate with the ideas here, especially those interested in disability theory, security, and systems of social control. Though this book exists outside the locus of academia, it is as well-referenced as any published research paper, and the footnotes for each section are extensive.

This leads to further reading, deeper understanding, and heightened awareness of how entrenched the panoptic viewpoint is rooted in our Cybercene Era, not only in its physical manifestations through technology, but in the greater systems of thought-organization itself as a kind of machine.

*Anti-Oculus* disrupts and challenges these notions, which makes it a welcome addition into the pantheon of anarchist-leaning philosophy, even if the building's hallways sometimes end without a doorway, and the stairs often have no handrails. It remains a structure worth exploring. After all, the panopticon cannot see you if you fall through a trap door that wasn't in the blueprints in the first place.

Jess Flarity has a PhD in Literature from the University of New Hampshire and writes frequently for Fifth Estate.



"I was told that I would be dead by the time I finished my sentence.

*Oscar López Rivera, sentenced to 55 years for 130 FALN bomb attacks IN 1974-1983.*

**T**his is an extraordinary compilation of stories from so many U.S. political prisoners. Those interviewed describe the movements they came from and through their eyes we can see parts of our shared radical history. This book brings a message of unconquerable resistance and that despite incarceration, the work of making a new world in the shell of the old continues to be done, defying the confinement and deprivations of the carceral system.

As someone who has seen the inside of several prisons for the past 16 years, and lived in both male and female prisons as a trans man, it was interesting to see how conditions change over time and exist in different places. Sadly, comments from hacktivist Jeremy Hammond, sentenced to ten years for releasing intelligence data to Wikileaks, on the increasing bans on books and requirement for the digitization and copying of prisoner mail, are correct.

An increasing number of prisons are putting draconian measures into effect to limit reading material and personal contact which will have a negative effect on the type of support prisoners can receive such as Books to Prisoners groups. This has had direct impact on those incarcerated at the federal institution where I am.

Before being sentenced to almost 22 years in prison for environmental sabotage, I worked with Books to Prisoners in three cities, formed important ties, and now as a prisoner reaching out



"Parents and Children"  
—Marius Mason

for it."

Before his release late last year, King assisted in the editing of the dozens of interview from the political prisoners whose writing fill this volume. Co-editor, Josh Davidson, a member of the Certain Days Calendar Collective, recorded the interviews.

Those whose words fill the pages is a long list of political prisoners, prisoners of war, some who

may be familiar and some not, but each is worth an investigation of why they

## Support Those Who Rattle Cages

**Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners**

Editors: Eric King and Josh Davidson; forward by Angela Davis

AK Press, 2023

to my community, miss the connection.

Books, letters, and news from the outside are vital in making the difference between dying in prison (literally or socially) and remaining alive, informed, and inspired. López Rivera's comments on the potential threat of disappearing into a dungeon are poignant.

What I appreciated most about the book was the opportunity to hear the individual voices of so many of my heroes of the movement, their own idiom, their own perspectives. The book gives the stories of prisoners with a wide range of political and social ideas, from the anarchist to the communist, from the non-believer to the religious, from the anti-authoritarian to the authoritarian. It was emotional for me to imagine their presence was made manifest in the free world, for their message to ring out and carry far.

Th words of co-editor, Eric King, just released after ten years of imprisonment for actions in solidarity with the 2014 Ferguson uprising, frame why this book is so necessary for reading and sharing. "We cannot turn our backs on these people with apathy or indifference. We need to love them the way they loved the world enough to fight

are behind bars.

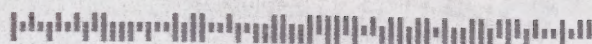
I was honored to be among those interviewed whose sentences added together have spent hundreds of years imprisoned enduring the horror of the American prison system. The others include Donna Willmott, James Kilgore, Mark Cook, Rebecca Rubin, Hanif Shabazz Bey, Chelsea Manning, Oso Blanco, Ann Hansen, Sean Swain, Martha Hennessy, Jalil Muntaqim, Jeremy Hammond, Kojo Bomani Sababu, Laura Whitehorn, Eric King, Rattler, Ray Luc Levasseur, Elizabeth McAlister, Malik Smith, David Campbell, Xinachtli, David Gilbert, Susan Rosenberg, Daniel McGowan, Linda Evans, Herman Bell, Jennifer Rose, Ed Mead, Jerry Koch, Michael Kimble, Bill Harris, Jaan Laaman, Jake Conroy, Bill Dunne, and Oscar López Rivera.

Besides the information and inspiration you gain from reading these personal accounts of motivation, dreams, and vision, purchase of the book provides solidarity for those incarcerated. Sales of the book benefits the Anarchist Black Cross Warchest program.

Marius Mason is a transgender anarchist, environmentalist, and animal rights prisoner. [supportmariusmason.org](http://supportmariusmason.org)



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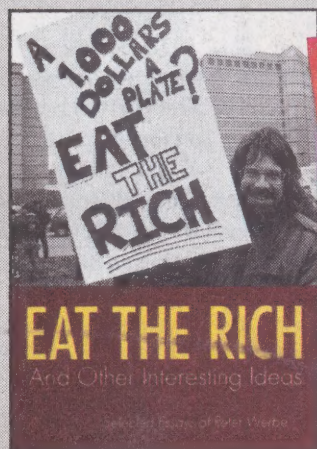
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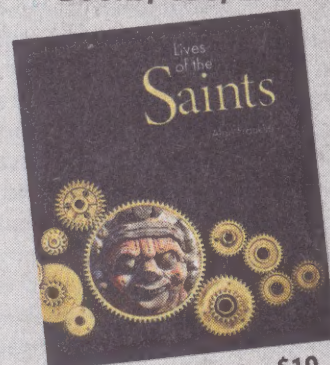
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